The conduct of Lord Laird
The Committee for Privileges and Conduct

The Committee for Privileges and Conduct is appointed each session by the House to consider questions regarding its privileges and claims of peerage and precedence and to oversee the operation of the Code of Conduct. Detailed consideration of matters relating to the Code of Conduct is undertaken by the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct.

Current Membership

The Members of the Committee for Privileges and Conduct are:
Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Lord Bassam of Brighton
Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville
Lord Eames
Lord Howe of Aberavon (until 5 December 2013)
Lord Hill of Oareford
Lord Irvine of Lairg
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Baroness Scotland of Asthal
Lord Scott of Foscote
Lord Sewel (Chairman)
Viscount Ullswater (from 5 December 2013)

The Members of the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct are:
Lord Cope of Berkeley
Lord Dholakia
Lord Irvine of Lairg
Baroness Manningham-Buller (Chairman)
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The Code of Conduct and the up-to-date Register of Lords’ Interests are on the Internet at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldreg.htm

General Information

General information about the House of Lords and its Committees can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/business/lords

Contacts

General correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Committee for Privileges and Conduct, House of Lords, London, SW1A 0PW (telephone 020 7219 3112).

Correspondence relating to the work of the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct should be addressed to the Clerk of the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct, House of Lords, London, SW1A 0PW (telephone 020 7219 1228).
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The Committee for Privileges and Conduct has considered a report by the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards on the conduct of Lord Laird (at Annex 1). The Committee has also considered a report by the Subcommittee on Lords’ Conduct (at Annex 2).

The procedure in cases such as this is set out in the Guide to the Code of Conduct. Under this procedure, the Commissioner investigates allegations against Members. He reports his findings to the Sub-Committee, which, if the Commissioner has found the Member to have breached the Code, recommends any action that the Member concerned should take and any sanction that the House should apply. The Sub-Committee does not reopen the Commissioner’s findings, which are reported without amendment to the Committee for Privileges and Conduct. The Member may then appeal to that Committee against the Commissioner’s findings or the Sub-Committee’s recommended sanction, or both.

Summary of the case

This case arose out of a request by Lord Laird that the Commissioner for Standards should investigate his conduct in connection with two separate sets of allegations. The first set of allegations arose from the Sunday Times articles in which undercover journalists purported to act for consultants working on behalf of a South Korean solar energy investor. These allegations are the same as those in the cases of Lords Cunningham of Felling, Mackenzie of Framwellgate and O’Neill of Clackmannan (though no article was in fact published about Lord O’Neill of Clackmannan). The second set of allegations arose from a BBC Panorama programme in which undercover reporters purported to act on behalf of a group called the Society of Friends of Fiji. No other Members of the House of Lords featured in that Panorama programme (but one MP did—the House of Commons Commissioner’s investigation into that MP has not yet concluded.)

The Commissioner’s findings

The Commissioner found that Lord Laird breached the Code of Conduct in three respects.

All three of the Commissioner’s findings relate to the requirement in paragraph 8(b) of the Code that Members must always act on their personal honour. In particular, the findings are that Lord Laird demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would have involved him breaching the Code. The findings are:

- first, that Lord Laird attempted to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would have involved him in helping to create an all-party group at the behest of the consultants in return for payment or other reward;

- secondly, that Lord Laird attempted to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would have involved him providing parliamentary services in return for payment or other reward;
thirdly, that Lord Laird attempted to negotiate an agreement with the undercover *Panorama* reporters which would have involved him helping to create an all-party group at the behest of the client in return for payment or other reward.

6. The facts are set out briefly in the report from the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct and in detail in the report from the Commissioner for Standards.

7. The Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct has considered the case and recommended that Lord Laird be suspended from the service of the House for four months.

Lord Laird’s appeal

8. Lord Laird appealed against all three findings and against the recommended sanction of four months’ suspension.

The Committee’s role

9. The role of the Committee for Privileges and Conduct when there is an appeal is set out in paragraph 133 of the *Guide to the Code*:

   “On appeal, the Committee will not reopen the Commissioner’s investigation. Rather members of the Committee will use their judgment to decide whether, on the balance of probabilities, they endorse the conclusions of the Commissioner; they will also consider whether or not the recommended sanction is appropriate.”

10. Accordingly, the Committee has considered the reports of the Commissioner and the Sub-Committee. The Committee has also considered Lord Laird’s written appeal and met to hear oral evidence from him. Lord Laird’s written appeal and the full transcript of the meeting with him are printed with this report (at Annex 3).

Lord Laird’s submissions

11. Lord Laird argued in his oral and written submissions that, by referring to some insulting remarks made by Lord Laird to the reporters about Members of the House of Lords (see paragraph 25 of the Commissioner’s report), the Commissioner had “set the tone” for his inquiry and shown himself to have been prejudiced against Lord Laird (Q2). Lord Laird said that because such remarks did not and could not constitute a breach of the Code, the Commissioner should not have raised them. By introducing matters that were not relevant and by commenting that these matters reflected no credit on Lord Laird, the Commissioner had, according to Lord Laird, revealed “a level of bias” (Q2). It seems to the Committee however that the Commissioner was required to examine Lord Laird’s unflattering remarks about Members of the House in order to reach his conclusion that they fell outside his remit. He had to raise them in order to dismiss them. He could not have proceeded in his investigation or reached his conclusions in any other way. We conclude that the Commissioner’s comments about Lord Laird’s remarks about the House and its Members cannot reasonably be regarded as showing prejudice.

12. In his appeal Lord Laird disputed the Commissioner’s first finding, namely, that there was strong evidence that Lord Laird had demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would involve him in helping to
set up an all-party group in return for payment by the consultants who were in fact *Sunday Times* journalists. Lord Laird argued that the evidence clearly showed his total opposition to creating an all-party group. However, we find Lord Laird’s submissions difficult to reconcile with statements such as “everybody else is a bloody chairman of an APPG [all-party group], why can’t I be a chairman of an APPG?”, “it’s better to have one [i.e. an all-party group] than not have one”, and with his answer to the reporter when asked whether he might be able to help them to set up an all-party group “Oh, I would have thought so” (see Commissioner’s report, paragraphs 32–33). We acknowledge that there is evidence showing that Lord Laird was not an enthusiastic promoter of all-party groups. But his opposition seems to us to have been based on tactical considerations that an all-party group would not achieve what the prospective employer wanted (p175), and was not based on the principle that helping to set up a group in return for payment was prohibited by the Code (Q3).

13. Lord Laird submitted that there is no evidence that payment or other reward was mentioned in connection with establishing the all-party group (Q4). However, we found persuasive evidence to the contrary. For example, in the initial email from the undercover *Sunday Times* journalist suggesting a meeting with Lord Laird, the journalist stated that there would be “an extremely generous remuneration package including a quarterly bonus” (p105). In paragraph 42 of the Commissioner’s report he quotes Lord Laird saying to the consultants “if I’m employed by you good people”. Lord Laird also told the undercover journalists “I’d like to be able to help you guys, for a minor consideration, of course” (p73).

14. Lord Laird also argued that paragraph 38 of the Commissioner’s report (which found Lord Laird had failed to act on his personal honour) was inconsistent with paragraph 39 (which found that Lord Laird had not reached an actual agreement which would involve providing parliamentary services in return for payment). In our view, Lord Laird does not here appreciate that the expression of a clear willingness to breach the Code is in itself a breach of the Code, even if no actual agreement is achieved or no money changes hands. We conclude that on the balance of probabilities the Commissioner was correct in finding that Lord Laird expressed a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would have involved him helping to establish an all-party group in return for payment, in breach of paragraph 8(b) of the Code.

15. We turn now to the Commissioner’s second finding: that Lord Laird attempted to negotiate an agreement with the undercover *Sunday Times* journalists which would have involved him providing parliamentary services in return for payment or other reward. This finding is based on Lord Laird’s comments to the journalists which “taken as a whole create a distinct picture” of willingness to accept payment for parliamentary services (paragraph 52 of the Commissioner’s report). The comments include, for example, “… we can run debates, we can take part in debates … put down amendments in debates; … putting down questions, or writing to the minister.” According to Lord Laird, these comments were nothing more than a description of the role of a Member of the House of Lords, and that in explaining what Members did, he was merely trying to be helpful and informative (Q9). Lord Laird also pointed out that there was no contract for the provision of parliamentary services or any memorandum that could lead to a contract or any verbal agreement as to what such a memorandum or
contract should contain. He said that his conversation with the journalists was at times muddled but was exploratory and that he promised nothing (see his appeal document at Annex 3).

16. This submission must be weighed against what Lord Laird clearly anticipated could follow from his conversations with the supposed consultants and what he could do in Parliament, as revealed in the following exchanges:

Lord Laird: … The point is, it’s done on a—Some of the guys, for instance, in the Lords where I will get them to put down questions for me.

Female Reporter: You get them to put down questions?

Lord Laird: Yeah, and then I put down questions for them. And then what you do is sort of er—

Female Reporter: And what’s the reason for getting them to do it and not doing it yourself?

Lord Laird: Well, because if I’m employed by you good people and I put down a question which is related to you guys making money, I’d have to put an “I” beside it because I’ve got an interest.

Female Reporter: Oh I see, and that draws a lot of attention and—

Lord Laird: Well, it’s fine, and you get the same answer. It’s better not to do it that way. It’s better to do it through another guy, … (p104).

We believe that these exchanges show that Lord Laird envisaged a financial relationship with a possible future employer and, knowing that tabling questions on behalf of the employer was against the Code, intended to get round this obstacle by asking what he described as “a coterie” of other Members to put his questions for him (Q8). Moreover, as we have already stated, a clear willingness to breach the Code is in itself a breach of the Code, even if no actual agreement is achieved. We believe that Lord Laird’s intention in reciting all the things he could do as a Member of the House was to make himself more attractive to his potential employer and to enhance his value to them. We are therefore satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the Commissioner correctly found that Lord Laird attempted to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would have involved him providing parliamentary services in return for payment or other reward.

17. We turn now to the Commissioner’s finding about the Panorama conversation. Lord Laird submitted that there is no evidence to show that he demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would involve him in helping to create an all-party group on Fiji in return for payment or reward by the consultancy which featured in the Panorama programme. He said that the only reference to payment was in relation to the cost of setting up an all-party group and asks us to believe that he would have been prepared to work without payment (QQ6, 16). We do not believe that the evidence supports Lord Laird’s contention. There is the statement quoted in paragraph 69 of the Commissioner’s report where Lord Laird said: “if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it”, which Lord Laird explains by saying that he was making a joke to someone he thought was a fellow professional in public relations (Q5). There is also Lord
Laird’s statement in paragraph 85 of the Commissioner’s report that “the point is, if I take this on … I would be doing it for monetary reward”, and he referred to himself as “the guy they pay”. Moreover, there is evidence that Lord Laird even indicated how much he might expect to be paid: “you’re probably talking about starting at £2,000 a month anyway … That would be the sort of minimum if I were to do anything.” (p210) Lord Laird said in oral evidence that £2,000 was in any case “a very small fee in public relations terms” (Q6). In the light of this evidence and on the balance of probabilities we affirm the Commissioner’s finding that Lord Laird attempted to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Panorama reporters which would have involved him in helping to create an all-party group at the behest of the client in return for payment or other reward.

The Committee’s decision

18. The Committee has decided on the basis of the material in the Commissioner’s report and in Lord Laird’s written and oral appeal that the Commissioner reached the correct conclusions in finding that Lord Laird expressed a clear willingness to breach the House’s Code of Conduct, contrary to paragraph 8(b) of the Code that Members should always act on their personal honour. The Committee has therefore affirmed the Commissioner’s findings. The Committee has considered the sanction proposed by the Sub-Committee and taken account of the information about Lord Laird’s medical condition in the confidential medical reports that he submitted first to the Commissioner and then to us. Given the serious nature of Lord Laird’s misconduct, we confirm the recommended sanction of four months’ suspension.

19. We do not therefore uphold Lord Laird’s appeal. We recommend that Lord Laird be suspended from the service of the House for four months.
ANNEX 1: REPORT FROM THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON LORDS’ CONDUCT

1. The Commissioner for Standards has submitted the attached report into the conduct of Lord Laird.

2. Lord Laird asked the Commissioner to investigate him following two conversations between Lord Laird and undercover reporters, which were covertly reported. The first conversation was with undercover Sunday Times journalists. The journalists posed as strategic consultants representing a South Korean investor looking to market innovative solar technology in the United Kingdom. The consultants wanted to recruit parliamentarians to further the client’s interests within Parliament and government. The newspaper subsequently published articles about Lord Laird alleging that during the conversation Lord Laird breached the Code of Conduct by indicating that he was willing (a) to help establish an all-party group at the behest of the client; (b) to act as a paid advocate in the House of Lords and to provide parliamentary advice and services; (c) to host functions in the House of Lords on behalf of the paying clients.

3. The second conversation was between Lord Laird and undercover reporters working for the BBC Panorama programme. The reporters posed as communications consultants representing a group called the Society of Friends of Fiji, whose objective was to improve the image of Fiji in order to assist its re-entry into the Commonwealth. The consultants wanted to recruit parliamentarians to further the client’s interests within Parliament and the government. The Panorama programme subsequently broadcast alleged that during the conversation Lord Laird breached the Code of Conduct by indicating that he was willing (a) to help establish an all-party group at the behest of the client; (b) to act as a paid advocate in the House and to provide parliamentary advice and services. The Panorama programme was accompanied by newspaper articles in The Sunday Telegraph.

4. The Commissioner finds that Lord Laird breached the Code of Conduct in three respects:

   (i) he breached the requirement in paragraph 8(b) of the Code of Conduct to act always on his personal honour by demonstrating a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would involve him helping to create an all-party group at the behest of Coulton & Goldie (the consultants that the journalists purported to represent) in return for payment or other reward;

   (ii) he breached paragraph 8(b) of the Code by demonstrating a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would involve him providing parliamentary advice or services to Coulton & Goldie in return for payment or other reward;

   (iii) he breached paragraph 8(b) of the Code by demonstrating a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Panorama reporters which would involve him helping to create an all-party group at the behest of Alistair Andrews Communications (the consultants that the reporters purported to represent) in return for payment or other reward.

5. The Commissioner found that Lord Laird did not reach an actual agreement to set up an all-party group for either client or to provide parliamentary advice or services to them, so was not in breach of paragraph 8(d) of the Code of Conduct. The Commissioner also found that Lord Laird did not demonstrate a clear
willingness to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would involve him breaching the rules on the use of House of Lords facilities, and so he did not breach paragraph 8(b) or 10(c) of the Code of Conduct in that respect.

6. In accordance with paragraphs 129 and 130 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct, our role has been to decide the appropriate sanction to recommend for the breaches.

7. We consider the breaches of the Code of Conduct by Lord Laird to be so serious that suspension from the service from the House is the only appropriate sanction. In considering the length of the suspension to recommend, we have taken account of all aspects of the case, as well as precedents of when members have been suspended. We have also taken account of the information about Lord Laird’s medical condition contained in his submission to the Commissioner, and the confidential medical statements which he appended to his submission (see paragraphs 97–99 of the Commissioner’s report). The date on which any suspension motion would be moved is uncertain (it would depend on when the Committee for Privileges and Conduct meets), as is the date of prorogation. Accordingly, we favour suspension for a defined period, rather than until the end of the session. **We recommend that Lord Laird be suspended from the service of the House for four months.**
ANNEX 2: REPORT BY THE HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS

Summary of allegations

1. On 2 June 2013 The Sunday Times newspaper published articles headlined “Cash for access: Lords exposed”, “Getting to see ministers is part of the package”, “Job swap ‘coterie’ to beat rules” and “How to buy a group of MPs and peers” (appendix A). The articles alleged that several members of the House of Lords, including Lord Laird, had breached the Code of Conduct. The allegations arose from an investigation by The Sunday Times which involved discussions between members and journalists posing as consultants purportedly acting on behalf of a South Korean solar energy company. The journalists met the members concerned and covertly recorded the conversations. Separate reports will be submitted in respect of each of the four members against whom The Sunday Times made allegations (though stories were only published in respect of three of them).

2. Also on 2 June 2013 The Sunday Telegraph published an article headlined “Lord is caught in lobbying scandal” (appendix B). This article arose from an investigation by The Sunday Telegraph and the BBC Panorama programme which involved discussions between a member of each House and reporters of the BBC posing as consultants purportedly acting on behalf of a group call the Society of Friends of Fiji. The reporters met Lord Laird and covertly recorded the conversation. Allegations about Lord Laird and Patrick Mercer MP were broadcast on Panorama on 6 June 2013.

3. Lord Laird emailed my office on 31 May 2013 requesting a meeting to brief me on “recent attempts to entrap me, including one conducted by Snapper TV in relation to the Society of Friends of Fiji.” He sent a further email on 1 June 2013 advising that “it seems there may be an article in the Sunday Times about a separate scam.” On 3 June 2013 Lord Laird sent a further email in which he made clear that he was referring himself in respect of “the scams undertaken by Panorama/the Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Times”.¹ In compliance with paragraph 103 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct, I obtained the agreement of the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct to initiate an investigation on the basis of Lord Laird’s self-referral.

4. I wrote to Lord Laird on 7 June 2013 (appendix D) advising that I was investigating him and specifically drew his attention to the following provisions of the 2010 Code of Conduct:

“7. In the conduct of their parliamentary duties, Members of the House shall base their actions on consideration of the public interest, and shall resolve any conflict between their personal interest and the public interest at once, and in favour of the public interest.

8. Members of the House:

(a) must comply with the Code of Conduct;

(b) should always act on their personal honour;

(c) must never accept or agree to accept any financial inducement as an incentive or reward for exercising parliamentary influence;

¹ The emails are reproduced in appendix C.
(d) must not seek to profit from membership of the House by accepting or agreeing to accept payment or other incentive or reward in return for providing parliamentary advice or services.

10. In order to assist in openness and accountability Members shall:

(c) act in accordance with any rules agreed by the House in respect of financial support for Members or the facilities of the House.

14. A Member must not act as a paid advocate in any proceedings of the House; that is to say, he or she must not seek by parliamentary means to confer exclusive benefit on an outside body or person from which he or she receives payment or reward.”

I also drew Lord Laird’s attention to relevant paragraphs of the Guide to the Code of Conduct, including those relevant to the use of facilities and services, and highlighted the seven general principles of conduct identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and incorporated in paragraph 9 of the Code. I sent Lord Laird copies of two House Committee reports which set out the rules on the use of the facilities of the House.2

5. I subsequently entered into lengthy correspondence with Lord Laird about supplying him with transcripts of the meetings with the two sets of undercover reporters, supplying audio-visual material of those meetings, with whom he may share the transcripts and material, and whether it was necessary to respond to both sets of allegations at the same time. On 24 July 2013 I sent Lord Laird a copy of the transcript provided by The Sunday Times of his meeting with their undercover journalists, together with emails exchanged between Lord Laird and The Sunday Times before the conversation and after the conversation but prior to publication (appendix F). Lord Laird questioned the accuracy of the transcript provided by The Sunday Times. I therefore asked House of Lords Hansard to produce a transcript of Lord Laird’s meeting with The Sunday Times based on the audio-visual material of that meeting.3 On 16 September 2013 I sent that transcript to Lord Laird, and it is that version of the transcript that is reproduced as appendix E to this report.4 On 9 July 2013 I supplied Lord Laird with the transcript of his meeting with the undercover BBC reporters (appendix H), together with transcripts his telephone conversations between him and one of the reporters before and after the meeting (appendices G and I) and a copy of a letter sent to him by the production company, Snapper TV, before the broadcast of Panorama (appendix J).

6. Throughout my prolonged exchanges with Lord Laird my objective was to obtain full and accurate accounts from him in respect of the allegations. On 7 October 2013 Lord Laird provided me with a written submission (appendix K). On 29 October 2013 I interviewed Lord Laird (appendix L).

7. Lord Laird’s written submission was sent four months after my first letter to him requesting his response to the allegations, and three months after he first

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3 I am grateful to House of Lords Hansard for producing that transcript. I would also like to put on record my thanks for the professional and efficient way that Hansard transcribed my interviews with Lord Laird and the other three members under investigation.

4 At my interview with Lord Laird he and his solicitor seemed to want to work off the transcript as provided by The Sunday Times. After some clarification we agreed to proceed on the basis of the transcript produced by Hansard. (See appendix L, page 187.)
received the BBC transcripts. It is a matter of regret that it took so long for Lord Laird to provide it. I consider it to be in the interests of all concerned—the member under investigation, the House and the public—for investigations to proceed at a reasonable pace, unless the requirements of fairness and natural justice dictate otherwise.

**Precedents**

8. Each case I investigate is determined on its individual merits. However, it is important that there is consistency between cases and that decisions made by the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct and the Committee for Privileges and Conduct are recognised, respected and influence future investigations where appropriate. Previous decisions approved by the House provide useful precedents and assist all concerned, including individual members, in interpreting the Code. This applies to cases decided before the new Code of Conduct came into force, when the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Interests (as it then was) conducted the initial investigation, where the provisions of the Code have not changed materially.

9. Many of the key issues raised in this case were addressed by the Committee for Privileges in its 2009 report on four peers, which was agreed by the House. In those cases the members concerned had been the subject of an undercover operation by *Sunday Times* journalists—in that instance to see whether peers would be prepared to table amendments to a bill in return for payment by a (fictitious) organisation. On the issue of entrapment the Committee for Privileges found as follows:

"**Entrapment**

12. Our responsibility, and that of the Sub-Committee, is to investigate allegations of non-compliance by Members of the House with the Code of Conduct. As the Sub-Committee point out, it was not our role “to adjudicate on a conflict between The Sunday Times and the Lords concerned” (paragraph 28).

13. No-one reading the transcripts of the conversations between the four Members and the undercover journalists can be left in any doubt that they were asked leading questions, designed to elicit apparently incriminating answers. At the time the story was published, on 25 January, no money had changed hands, and no contracts had been drawn up, still less signed. Nevertheless the newspaper chose to cut short its investigation and publish a story based on words, not decisive acts by any of the four Members. It follows that the headline used by the newspaper in publishing the allegations ("Revealed: Labour lords change laws for cash"), in implying improper acts by the four Members, was wilfully misleading.

14. Despite these concerns, we conclude that it would not be appropriate to disregard any of the evidence by reason only of the manner in which it was obtained. We consider that the Sub-Committee were right to reject suggestions that they should not rely on some of the evidence, on the ground that it had been obtained by *agents provocateurs*. In our judgment, the integrity of the proceedings themselves—either
before us or before the Sub-Committee—has in no sense been compromised by the conduct of the journalists in obtaining the evidence, which in our view did not amount to incitement to or instigation of a breach of the Code. It is the strength of the evidence itself which we regard as important for the purposes of our proceedings.”

10. In accordance with the precedent set in that case, I have investigated the current case on the merits of the evidence before me, and not sought to examine the conduct of the journalists concerned or the means by which they obtained material.

11. The 2009 report also found that an agreement to engage in paid advocacy would be a breach of the Code of Conduct; although it did not resolve how formal such an agreement must be, it found two members to have breached the Code even though no money changed hands and no contract was drawn up, still less signed. The 2010 Code of Conduct makes clear that members must never “accept or agree to accept” any financial inducement, payment or other reward in return for exercising parliamentary influence, or providing parliamentary advice or services. It is therefore clear from the Code and from the precedent set by the 2009 report that a member may be in breach of the Code by agreeing to provide parliamentary services etc., even though no money changes hands.

12. The 2009 report went on to examine the meaning of the requirement in the Code that members “should act always on their personal honour”. The committee’s main conclusion is replicated in paragraph 7 of the current Guide to the Code of Conduct. The key finding, so far as the current case is concerned, was: “It follows, in our view, that any Member who demonstrated a clear willingness to breach the rules contained in the Code (for instance, by attempting to negotiate an agreement to promote an amendment in return for a fee) would have failed to act upon his or her personal honour, and would have thereby breached paragraph 4(b) [now 8(b)] of the Code.” Thus a member may be found to have breached the Code by attempting to negotiate an agreement which would involve the member breaching the Code of Conduct.

13. The latest edition of the Guide to the Code of Conduct provides that “the civil standard of proof is adopted at all stages of the enforcement process ... Thus, in order to find against a Member, the Commissioner will require at least that the allegation is proved on the balance of probabilities.” The 2009 report elaborated on how the Committee for Privileges and the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Interests applied the standard of proof: “while taking the civil standard of proof, the balance of probabilities, as the appropriate standard, we have, in the light of the seriousness of the allegations, taken the view that particularly strong evidence should be required before we may be satisfied that the allegations are proved.” Given the similarity of many aspects of the 2009 allegations to the current case, I have followed this precedent on the evidence required to satisfy the standard of proof.

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8 Paragraph 8(c) and (d).
11 Para 119.
Other matters general to the four cases

14. In addition to the precedents arising from the 2009 report, there are a number of other factors which are common to the four cases I have investigated which arose from *The Sunday Times* allegations. First, as well as there being no contract signed and no money changing hands, there was no parliamentary action taken by the members as a result of their conversations with the journalists. Much of the discussion about providing parliamentary services was in general terms; unlike in 2009, there was no specific amendment or question that the journalists wanted tabled.

15. Secondly, no indication was given by the journalists in their initial emails making contact with the members of their intention to ask the members to provide parliamentary services. Rather, the initial contact focused largely on the solar energy product—a product which, given its public policy benefits, was bound to attract interest.

16. Thirdly, the stories in *The Sunday Times* were published following only one meeting with each of the peers. There were no follow-up meetings or conversations (though in some of the cases emails were exchanged), and the offers were withdrawn by the journalists soon after each meeting.

17. Finally, the articles published in *The Sunday Times* were, understandably, selective in the material they used. Only the more incriminating quotes were published; and members’ caveats and refusals to go along with certain propositions were omitted. Much of what was published was said in response to leading questions from the journalists.

18. The points above are set out to provide context. They do not, of themselves, provide a defence for any allegations that members were prepared to breach the Code. As per the approach to the 2009 cases, my approach has been to assess what the members actually said to the journalists at the meetings and in surrounding communications, and not simply to assess them against the allegations made by *The Sunday Times* or, in the case of Lord Laird, also by *The Sunday Telegraph* and on *Panorama*.

19. Separately, I should also mention that I first requested the transcripts of the undercover journalists’ conversations with the peers from the acting editor of *The Sunday Times* on 7 June 2013, but did not receive them until 23 July 2013. Although the delay in providing the transcripts in these cases was shorter than the nearly four-month delay in two previous cases, given the significant public interest in the cases it is regrettable that it still took 6½ weeks for the material to be provided. The BBC were more prompt in providing the transcript of their reporters’ conversations with Lord Laird.

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13 The first and fourth points also apply to the allegations about Lord Laird broadcast on *Panorama*. The second point applies to a lesser extent because the undercover reporter made clear his desire to create an all-party group on a few occasions in his initial telephone conversation with Lord Laird. The third point does not apply because, two months after their meeting, Lord Laird attempted to make contact with one of the undercover reporters; when they did speak on the telephone Lord Laird maintained his interest. These matters are covered in more detail later in this report.

Key facts

20. There were two distinct sets of allegations that Lord Laird breached the Code of Conduct. The first arose from his meeting with undercover *Sunday Times* journalists. I will deal with these allegations in Part I of this report. The second arose from his conversations with undercover *Panorama* reporters. I will deal with these allegations in Part II of this report.

Part I: Allegations arising from *The Sunday Times*

21. The allegations of misconduct by Lord Laird arose from the newspaper stories in appendix A. The background to the coverage in *The Sunday Times* appears to be uncontested: namely that journalists employed by *The Sunday Times* posed as “strategic consultants” and approached Lord Laird (and other peers). The journalists purported to work for a company called Coulton & Goldie Global (hereafter C&G), which was acting on behalf of a (fictitious) South Korean technology company.

22. The C&G personnel, who called themselves James Lloyd and Robyn Fox, established contact with Lord Laird by way of an email on 14 May 2013, in which they introduced the product and said that Lord Laird’s “personal business and political acumen could be a great asset to us”. Lord Laird’s “special adviser”, Kevin Cahill, replied and a meeting over lunch was arranged for 20 May 2013, at which Mr Cahill would also be present. That meeting took place and was covertly recorded by the journalists. The subsequent article in *The Sunday Times* was based on the recording of the meeting on 20 May 2013.

23. The C&G representatives claimed that the South Korean company they represented had developed innovative solar energy technology. Specifically, the company had developed solar PV technology which could be fitted to windows and generate solar power. The window panes would be more efficient at generating energy and more transparent than any competitor; they would therefore help the Government achieve their renewable energy and zero-carbon homes targets. The technology would be funded by a South Korean investor. C&G were seeking to assist their client in breaking into the UK market. Lord Laird summed up their position as, “You’re looking to create a climate of opinion which will allow the company to have its products better understood by government, accepted by government and by potential clients”\(^{15}\) They said they were “talking to MPs and talking to peers and sort of trying to get that climate of opinion to filter up from the bottom rather than just going in and attempting to get a meeting with the Prime Minister or something like that.”\(^{16}\)

24. Three sets of allegations were made in *The Sunday Times* and emerge from the transcript. First, that Lord Laird was willing to help establish an all-party group at the behest of the client. Secondly, that he was prepared to act as a paid advocate in the House and to provide parliamentary advice and services in return for payment or other reward. Thirdly, that he was prepared to host functions in the House of Lords on behalf of a paying client, in breach of the rules. I will deal with each of these three matters in turn.

25. In addition to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct, *The Sunday Times* reported certain other comments made by Lord Laird. In particular, having said that the female reporter starts off “with the MPs a couple of steps ahead of

\(^{15}\) Appendix E, page 63.

\(^{16}\) Appendix E, page 63.
everyone else because you’re an attractive female”, Lord Laird said “the trouble is in the Lords, they tend to be homosexuals.” He then told a joke about debates in the House of Lords which ended with: “Homosexuals and foxes are the only thing that fill the bloody place.” These remarks did not and could not constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and I therefore did not question Lord Laird about them. However, it would be remiss of me if I did not simply highlight that these remarks reflect no credit on Lord Laird.

Allegation about creating an all-party group

26. The rules governing all-party groups (APGs) are set out in the Guide to the Rules on All-Party Groups produced by the House of Commons, the latest edition of which was published in March 2012. These rules apply to members of the House of Lords.

27. APGs are informal, cross-party interest groups that have no official status within Parliament and are not accorded any powers or funding by it. APGs are essentially run by and for members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Mostly they are run by backbenchers, though ministers may also be officers or members of APGs and many groups choose to involve individuals and organisations from outside Parliament in their administration and activities.

28. APGs must include at least 20 members (each of whom must be a member of the House of Commons or House of Lords), comprising: at least 10 members who are from the same political party as the Government; and at least 10 who are not from the government party, of whom at least six must be from the main opposition party. Unlike establishing a new select committee (which, in the House of Lords, would normally require the approval of the Liaison Committee then the House itself), an APG can be established by the requisite number of members agreeing to set it up, without further approval needed by a select committee or either House.

29. In the context of this investigation, I suggest that the most relevant rules are those that state that APGs are essentially run by and for members and are cross-party interest groups. The underlying assumption is that they are created by members who share a common interest and who come together to address a particular issue. The concept of creating an APG at the behest of a commercial organisation seems prima facie incompatible with the overall tenor of the rules and guidance. The possibility that an external body or company may support an APG, including by providing financial support, is recognised in the rules.

30. There is no specific reference to APGs in the Code of Conduct for Members of House of Lords and Guide to the Code of Conduct. However, I believe that the creation of an APG at the behest of a commercial organisation in return for payment or other reward is at variance with the concept of personal honour. Moreover, as only members of either House can establish an APG, I consider that an agreement to help establish an APG—for example by becoming an office-holder in the group, or approaching other members to request them to become members—is a parliamentary service and so, if done in return for payment or other incentive or reward, is a breach of the prohibition on providing parliamentary services in paragraph 8(d) of the Code.

31. An agreement by a member to help establish an APG would in my judgement also contravene the onus on members to observe the general principles of conduct.

17 Appendix E, pages 102–03.

identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which are incorporated in paragraph 9 of the Code of Conduct, in particular the following principles:

“Selflessness: Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity: Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Leadership: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.”

32. The first mention of creating an all-party group occurred about a third of a way through the conversation between Lord Laird and the undercover journalists. The male reporter said, “One of the things we were thinking about was an all-party group on solar energy.”¹⁹ Lord Laird replied asking if there was already one; the reporters answered that there was not. Shortly thereafter Lord Laird said:

“Don’t put too much faith in an all-party group. It’s important, it’s good, it’s necessary, all that sort of stuff, but it’s almost a case of some of these guys think of—you know, we need an all-party group of one-legged lesbians for Europe, that sort of stuff, because it gives you a better position, because you’ve got to get so many people in from various different parties, from both Houses, and this type of thing, and it gives a guy a place. Everybody else is a bloody chairman of an APPG, why can’t I be a chairman of an APPG?

Kevin Cahill: About time, yep yep yep.

Lord Laird: We do have that, but it’s better to have one than not have one. But we are going to—it is going to be necessary to—in terms of the APPG, you’re going to have to do things with them. I mean, we’re taking some of the APPG, some of the Azerbaijan APPG with us to Baku next week. You take them out and look after them, those sort of things.”²⁰

33. He then advises the consultants that “there’s a bit of money involved, you know, because you’ve got to pay for a lot of these guys to go out there and do all sorts of stuff”.²¹ Then the following exchange took place:

“Male Reporter: Do you think you might be able to help us set up a parliamentary group?

Lord Laird: Oh, I would have thought so.

Female Reporter: Yeah? Brilliant.

Male Reporter: Would you be able to say, for example, be the chair of it?

Lord Laird: No, I couldn’t. It’s best me not being a chair of it. Tactics-wise, it’s best to get a chair from the House of Commons. The Lords, they don’t allow [unclear].”²²

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¹⁹ Appendix E, page 64.
²⁰ Appendix E, pages 64–65. Lord Laird is a member of the Azerbaijan All-Party Parliamentary Group.
²¹ Appendix E, page 65.
²² Appendix E, page 65.
34. A little later Lord Laird was asked if he would be able to be an officer of the group. He replied “If necessary, if necessary.”

Towards the end of the conversation, when they were talking about the next steps, the female reporter asked if Lord Laird could indicate his interest in the work. He replied:

“Lord Laird: Oh yeah, yeah, I just want to—to be honest with you, what I want to do is look down the APPG list and all the other stuff and get a feel for it and then I’ll come back to you.

Female Reporter: Brilliant, but in principle you’re interested?

Lord Laird: Oh I mean I love this sort of stuff.”

35. In his submission to me Lord Laird stated that he would not have chaired the APG because of health issues; and the tactical advice about getting an MP to chair it was given in an unpaid capacity.

He also made representations about the acceptability of third parties paying for parliamentarians travelling to learn about other countries under the auspices of an APG. The latter issue is not material to my investigation. My concern is solely whether Lord Laird agreed to create, or showed a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement involving the creation of, an APG at the behest of a paying client.

36. In my interview with Lord Laird he said that he was not keen on APGs; that the discussion about creating an APG was preliminary and he would want to go away and check what was agreed, and ensure any agreement was in writing; and that he thought he was talking to fellow public relations professionals. He also said that it was his “gut feeling would be that it would not be the right thing to do to take money for setting up an APPG. But it’s never actually happened.”

37. The extracts above of Lord Laird’s conversation with the undercover journalists clearly indicate that Lord Laird would have been willing to help the consultants set up an APG and “if necessary” become an officer of the group. He said he would not be its chair because “tactics-wise” it is better to have an MP as chair (though he previously asked rhetorically why he could not be a chairman of an APG). Although Lord Laird had a reservation about the efficacy of creating an APG, and said he wanted to “look down the APPG list”, his reservation was about how useful an APG would be to the client, rather than whether it would be within the rules. At no point during the discussion about an APG did Lord Laird express caution about whether it was within the rules to help create one.

38. I believe that there is sufficiently strong evidence for me to find that Lord Laird demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would involve him helping to create an all-party group in return for payment by C&G. In doing so Lord Laird failed to act on his personal honour, and so I find him in breach of paragraph 8(b) of the Code of Conduct.

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23 Appendix E, page 70.
24 Appendix E, page 87.
26 Appendix K, page 170.
27 Appendix L, page 188. Lord Laird’s views on the effectiveness of APGs were set out at greater length in the part of our interview dealing with the BBC allegations.
28 Appendix L, pages 189 and 191.
29 Appendix L, page 189. This is a matter I deal with later in this report.
30 Appendix L, page 190.
39. Lord Laird declined the suggestion that he might become chair of the group and did not raise the subject again during the conversation or subsequently. He took no subsequent steps to help create the group. These factors lead me to conclude that there is not sufficiently strong evidence to find that he reached an actual agreement to accept payment in return for providing the parliamentary service of helping to create an all-party group. I therefore find that he did not breach paragraph 8(d) of the Code of Conduct.

Alleged provision of parliamentary advice and services, and paid advocacy

40. Under paragraph 8(d) of the Code of Conduct members “must not seek to profit from membership of the House by accepting or agreeing to accept payment or other incentive or reward in return for providing parliamentary advice or services.” That is supplemented by paragraph 14, which provides, “A Member must not act as a paid advocate in any proceedings of the House; that is to say, he or she must not seek by parliamentary means to confer exclusive benefit on an outside body or person from which he or she receives payment or reward.” Paragraph 24 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct gives examples of parliamentary proceedings which, if performed by a member in return for payment or other incentive or reward by an outside body, would constitute paid advocacy. The examples include speaking in a debate, tabling an amendment to legislation and asking a written or oral question. Paragraph 19 of the Guide provides examples of what is and is not parliamentary advice. The bars on providing parliamentary advice or services in return for reward and on paid advocacy are absolute: the fact that a member may declare an interest when participating in the parliamentary proceedings is immaterial.

41. The first time Parliament is discussed in any detail during Lord Laird’s conversation with the undercover journalists was when the female reporter refers to creating a “climate of opinion” amongst MPs and peers, and getting them to approach the Prime Minister. Lord Laird replied:

“Well, yeah, the key to this are the backbenchers. You go to government, and their civil servants will not allow them to do anything outside, if you can get away with it, anything outside the frame of what the civil servants want. You need the backbenchers, the guys like myself, in both chambers, who hold the Government to account and have a way to hold the Government to account and putting these things to government. So you’ve got to build up a good lobby there, a good understanding.”\footnote{Appendix E, page 63.}

42. A little later there is a discussion about where to site a factory building the solar panels. The conversation moved from that to the following exchange:

“Lord Laird: Very informal. The point is, it’s done on a—Some of the guys, for instance, in the Lords where I will get them to put down questions for me.

Female Reporter: You get them to put down questions?

Lord Laird: Yeah, and then I put down questions for them. And then what you do is sort of er—

Female Reporter: And what’s the reason for getting them to do it and not doing it yourself?
Lord Laird: Well, because if I’m employed by you good people and I put down a question which is related to you guys making money, I’d have to put a—I can do it, but I have to put an “I” beside it because I’ve got an interest.

Female Reporter: Oh I see, and that draws a lot of attention and—

Lord Laird: Well, it’s fine, and you get the same answer. It’s better not to do it that way. It’s better to do it through another guy, and then a—

Male Reporter: Is this in relation to Azerbaijan?

Lord Laird: No, anything, anything.

Male Reporter: Or in relation to other clients?

Lord Laird: Anything, anything. Anything at all where you’ve got a financial interest and the answer could be [unclear]. They’re not opposed to doing it, you’ve just got to signal that this is what is happening if it’s of benefit to someone.

Female Reporter: Yes. That’s very—So this is the sort of thing that we just would have no idea how that sort of thing works. It’s so helpful to have someone who’s an expert explain.

Lord Laird: Yeah, and that’s totally legitimate. All that’s totally legitimate. Nobody—I’d be very careful. We have to be careful, because I mean, I’m not—I mean, you wouldn’t expect me to cross the line. I mean, this is rather—I wouldn’t cross the line.

Female Reporter: No.

Lord Laird: I know you’re not saying I would cross the line, I know.”

43. This is the first time the prospect of tabling questions in the House of Lords was raised. It is notable that Lord Laird linked the tabling of questions to the client making money, and to him having a financial interest. Lord Laird referred to not crossing the line—presumably a reference to not breaking the rules—but gave the impression that it was “totally legitimate” to “put down a question which is related to you guys [i.e. the consultants or the South Korean investor] making money”, so long as he declared his interest by way of an “I” being put next to the question on the order paper.

44. In my interview with him, Lord Laird said that the above discussion “was based on the concept that it would need to be checked out. As I kept saying, I will not cross the line. I was just explaining the way some things operated.” He continued, “I wasn’t going to break the rules. I mightn’t at that precise moment know exactly every jot and tittle of the rules, but I wasn’t going to break them.” He referred to being under pressure during the interview, implying that he agreed with the consultants’ propositions so as not to prolong a stressful conversation.

45. Shortly after Lord Laird was asked, “So things like putting down questions is something you might—you wouldn’t want to do personally, but you might be able to find a friend who could do that?” He replied, “No, I wouldn’t. But I mean the point is, I’d talk to other people who are interested, and they’d put down

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32 Appendix E, pages 68–69.
33 Appendix L, page 192.
34 Appendix L, page 193.
35 Appendix L, pages 194–96.
questions, so that’s not a problem.” 36 In his written submission to me Lord Laird explained that he had tabled almost 12,000 written questions since entering the Lords in 1999 and that he had discussed potential questions with other peers, and for tactical reasons another member might table a question on his behalf, or vice versa. 37 I see nothing inherently wrong in that. However, it would be a matter of concern if a member asks another member to table a question because the first member has a financial interest in it and does not want that revealed.

46. Later in the conversation the following exchange took place:

“Female Reporter: Oh right, fascinating. So we talked about the APPGs, which is great, and we talked about questions, which is brilliant, and then for example, what about things like, are you able to advise us on or help us with things like amendments and debates and things like that?

Lord Laird: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Female Reporter: Yeah? Because the Energy Bill is going through; it’s about to go through the Lords.

Male Reporter: They’re in last stages.

Lord Laird: That is not difficult because there’s actually a department of the Lords. You take your—I take along an idea that I want to put in as an amendment, I take it along and they will polish it up to be a proper amendment.

Female Reporter: Oh really? Fantastic, so we could come to you perhaps and say, “Well this is what”—

Lord Laird: Again, back to this point, I’m not sure I would put it down but that’s [unclear].

Female Reporter: Oh okay, that’s [unclear], okay.

Male Reporter: Would you have to get someone else to put it down?

Lord Laird: I would prefer that. That’s better.

Female Reporter: Well that’s, you know—[to waiter] thank you very much, that’s kind.

To be honest, I don’t suppose it makes much difference to us who puts it down or who asks the question, it’s just—and obviously you’d be in a good position to help us with that. So that kind of thing would be good. And what about debates and things like that? Because someone mentioned the members of the House can—

Lord Laird: Well that’s under the—I mean if I spoke on your behalf, I’d have to declare an interest. You can do it, I have done it, but it would be easier to get a coterie of people, supporters, and make a point that I would ask them to do this issue or that issue or whatever.

Female Reporter: You’d be able to kind of marshal—do you think you’d be able to help us marshal a coterie of people who could do that for us?

36 Appendix E, page 70.
37 Appendix K, pages 170–71. When asked for an example during my interview with him, Lord Laird said that he and the late Lord Corbett of Castle Vale had exchanged questions about the police (appendix L, page 193).
Lord Laird: I think I can do that. But that’s totally legitimate, there’s nothing incorrect about that.”38

47. In this extract Lord Laird agreed that he could advise the consultants about amendments and debates; and agreed that he could do preliminary work on amendments that the consultants may want tabling, although he would prefer it if it was tabled by another peer. He referred to speaking on behalf of the consultants, and said he would have to declare an interest. He suggested it would be better to recruit a “coterie” of supporters to make a point. Again, he said the services apparently on offer during this exchange were “totally legitimate”. In his interview with me Lord Laird again referred to how he would not breach the rules, and how he was under pressure during the conversation.39

48. Towards the end of the conversation the following exchange took place:

“Female Reporter: If we wanted someone to speak on behalf of, say, an adaptation of the building regulations to incorporate solar glass, as an example, is that the sort of thing—would we be able to write something that we could pass to somebody and they might be able to say it?

Lord Laird: Well, what you can do—look, let’s be—we can send a—we can send a—

Kevin Cahill: Just a minute now, sorry, age and diabetes—

Lord Laird: Look, we can run debates, we can take part in debates—this is the sort of thing we can do. Let’s say you’re trying to change the building regulations, we can take part in debates, put down amendments in debates; holding debates, putting down questions, or writing to the minister.

Female Reporter: Writing to the minister? Is that really something you can do as well?

Lord Laird: Yes and you must get a reply, which is government policy, and you must get it in a reasonable time.

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: And what it says is government policy.

Female Reporter: When you do that, do you have to declare your interest then as well?

Lord Laird: Ah, well, that’s the soft underbelly. What you do is you say, “Dear”—whatever it is, Fred or whatever minister—”I want to discuss such and such. I do have an interest in this topic”, that’s all you have to say.

Female Reporter: That could just be an interest.

Lord Laird: That’s it. You can ask a whole big series—that’s one of the things that you do, is ask a whole series of questions by letter.

Female Reporter: They have to reply to you?

Lord Laird: Pardon?

Female Reporter: Do they have to reply to you?

38 Appendix E, pages 89–90.
39 Appendix L, page 196.
Lord Laird: Oh yeah. Oh, they must reply.

Female Reporter: Is that—

Lord Laird: Absolutely. They would be in breach of Parliament if they didn’t.

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: Yes, they must reply to me, and what they write is Government policy.

Female Reporter: Wow.

Male Reporter: It’s a great way of finding out information, isn’t it?

Lord Laird: Yeah.40

49. During this exchange Lord Laird suggests a number of things that he can do as a member of the House: initiating and speaking in debates; tabling questions and amendments; and writing to ministers. In writing to ministers he suggests a way of declaring an interest in passing and then asking ministers a series of questions. He appeared to want to impress on the consultants the access that he has to ministers and his influence on parliamentary business as a member of the House of Lords; the implication being that that access and influence can be used to the advantage of the client.

50. In his written submission to me Lord Laird said that the above extract was a “description of the role of a peer.”41 In his interview with me Lord Laird emphasised that he did not make any actual offers during that exchange, he was merely describing what peers can do. All the conversation was subject to a document being drawn up which would set out what he would do for the consultants.42

51. In the four extracts above Lord Laird engaged in prolonged discussion with the consultants about peers’ activities in Parliament and in dealing with ministers. Certain things he said could be interpreted as merely descriptive or ambiguous; at other times—such as when he referred to tabling a question which relates to the consultants making money—the intention is clear. He referred to getting other members to table questions because he would have a financial interest. At one point Lord Laird talked about not crossing the line, but at other points he gave the impression that he considered the services he was offering to be “totally legitimate”. At no point did he explicitly mention the Code of Conduct, or say in direct response to a suggestion (such as the suggestion that he speak on behalf of the consultant) that it was against the rules. I accept that Lord Laird may have felt under pressure and, had he not felt under pressure, may have expressed himself in different terms. However, he did not appear at any point deliberately to move the conversation on; indeed, he seemed to want to provide further information about his activities as a peer, in order to impress the consultants further.

52. The comments above taken as a whole create a distinct picture that, if he were retained by the consultants, Lord Laird would be willing to provide parliamentary services to them or their clients. This seems to me sufficiently strong evidence to find that Lord Laird demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement that would involve the provision of parliamentary services in return for payment or

40 Appendix E, pages 96–97.
41 Appendix K, page 168.
42 Appendix K, page 197.
other reward. I therefore find that in respect of these allegations Lord Laird failed to act on his personal honour, and so breached paragraph 8(b) of the Code.

53. As no specific parliamentary services were proposed by the undercover journalists—matters were discussed in general terms; there was no specific amendment or question, for example—and no agreement was finalised by which Lord Laird would be retained by C&G there is not sufficiently strong evidence for me to find that Lord Laird agreed to provide parliamentary services in return for payment, in contravention of paragraph 8(d) of the Code of Conduct. For the same reason I do not find him in breach of the bar on paid advocacy in paragraph 14 of the Code.

Hosting functions in the House of Lords

54. Paragraph 10(c) of the Code of Conduct states that members shall “act in accordance with any rules agreed by the House in respect of … the facilities of the House.” That is supplemented by paragraph 101 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct, which provides that the rules governing the use of House facilities are set out in two House Committee reports.43

55. Separate rules apply to the use of refreshment outlets (such as the restaurants and bars in the House) and to the hosting of Refreshment Department functions (such as hosting a large lunch or dinner, or a reception). As regards the former, it is acceptable for a member to use a refreshment outlet in connection with their outside interests, including their commercial interests.44 As regards the latter, the rules provide that functions are not to be used for the purpose of direct or indirect financial or material gain by a sponsoring member, political party, or any other person or organisation. The rules further state, “Members may not sponsor promotional functions for companies in which they have a direct pecuniary interest.” The explanatory notes to the rules on the use of Refreshment Department functions state, “members should not receive payment or any other kind of benefit, such as an offer of employment based on the ability to provide access to House of Lords facilities, in return for hosting a function.”45

56. In respect of both sets of rules (those governing refreshment outlets and those governing functions) if a member follows the advice of the Director of Facilities he or she is deemed to have complied with the rules.

57. The rules on the use of facilities in the House of Lords state that committee and meeting rooms on the parliamentary estate are to be used primarily for purposes relating to members’ parliamentary duties. “However, it is accepted that Members may need to use committee and meeting rooms for incidental purposes relating to their outside interests, including their commercial interests … such rooms may not be used to promote Members’ outside interests.”46 Again, a member who follows the advice of the Director of Facilities in respect of this rule is deemed to have complied with the rules.

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58. During Lord Laird’s conversation with the undercover journalists the use of facilities came up in two respects. First, in the initial conversation about the South Korean investor Lord Laird, unprompted, asked if he would like to come to the Lords. Later he invited the consultants to the Palace of Westminster. They said it would be useful to take clients there. Lord Laird replied, “The point is, you wouldn’t call them clients. They’re just friends.” He also said he finds “it’s easier to do, particularly with foreigners, business in the Lords because they get carried away.”

59. The second way in which House of Lords facilities came up was when Lord Laird suggested someone from the organisation could do a lecture in the Lords about alternative fuel. He went on to talk about other lectures he organises in the Lords. In his written submission to me Lord Laird set out how he arranges lectures and discussion groups in the Lords. He elaborated on them in interview and said that he was aware of the rules about not promoting members’ commercial interests.

60. One or two of Lord Laird’s remarks about the use of House of Lords facilities were perhaps unfortunate. However, it is legitimate for members to host clients in Parliament for purposes relating to their outside interests, so long as it does not involve hosting a large function. It is also acceptable to use a meeting room for an outside organisation to give a lecture, so long as it is not used to promote a member’s outside commercial interests. There is not strong evidence to suggest that Lord Laird was attempting to negotiate an agreement that would involve him breaching the rules on the use of House of Lords facilities. I therefore find that he did not breach the Code of Conduct in respect of his comments about House of Lords facilities.

47 Appendix E, page 62.
48 Appendix E, page 75.
49 Appendix E, page 80.
50 Appendix E, page 71.
51 Appendix K, pages 161–62
52 Appendix L, page 198.
Part II: Allegations arising from *Panorama*

61. The second set of allegations of misconduct by Lord Laird arose from the BBC television programme *Panorama* broadcast on 6 June 2013 and a complementary article in *The Sunday Telegraph*. The background to the allegations appears to be uncontested: namely that reporters acting on behalf of the *Panorama* programme posed as consultants and approached Lord Laird. The reporters purported to work for a strategic communications company called Alistair Andrews Communications (“AAC”), which was acting on behalf of a fictitious entity called the Society of Friends of Fiji.

62. The AAC personnel, who called themselves Daniel Mann (identified in the transcript as DF) and Gemma Taylor (identified in the transcript as GT), established contact with Lord Laird by way of a telephone call on 7 March 2013. A meeting was subsequently arranged for 13 March 2013. That meeting took place and was covertly filmed by the journalists. The subsequent *Panorama* programme was based on the recording of that meeting. On 10 May 2013 Daniel Mann telephoned Lord Laird in apparent response to a message left for him by Lord Laird, and they discussed further the potential work offered by AAC.

63. The AAC representatives claimed that they were employed by the Society of Friends of Fiji with a view to having the suspension of Fiji from the Commonwealth lifted. They claimed that elections in Fiji were scheduled for September 2014 and that that development should lead to the suspension being ended. However, they suggested that Fiji needed to improve its image as suspension was affecting its economy. Daniel Mann said they had contacted Lord Laird because AAC wanted to “see if we could come up with some consultants, particularly people with parliamentary experience, who have international standing and whatever and see if they might be able to act as consultants or even sit on an advisory panel … your name was suggested”.

64. Two sets of allegations were made on *Panorama* and emerge from the transcripts of Lord Laird’s conversations with the undercover reporters. First, that Lord Laird was willing to help establish an all-party group on Fiji at the behest of AAC. Secondly, that he was prepared to act as a paid advocate in the House and to provide parliamentary advice and services in return for payment or other reward. I will deal with these two matters in turn.

**Allegation about creating an all-party group**

65. In Part I of this report I set out the rules that relate to all-party groups, and the provisions of the Code that would be breached were a member to help set one up, or to agree to help set one up, or to negotiate an agreement which would involve helping set one up, in return for payment or other reward. I do not repeat those passages here.

66. In the initial approach by AAC to Lord Laird by way of a telephone call Daniel Mann said, “One of the things they are keen to do is see if they can get an all-party parliamentary group set up for Fiji because amazingly there isn’t one at the moment and that was one of the things I was going to ask if you were interested in helping out with?” Lord Laird replied, “Okay … I’d have to check, as you know

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there are endless APPGs, is there one for South Pacific Islands or something?\(^{54}\)

At that end of that telephone conversation the following exchange happened:

“DF: And just on the, I mentioned the APPG, I know the Society are quite keen to get one, because it will provide a kind of forum and a platform, is that something you could potentially help with, do you think?

LL: I could, but I would be very reluctant for anybody to spend a lot of time putting up an APPG because they more apparent than real if you know what I mean.

DF: I know, but it’s what they’re asking for, so you’ll understand that they are our clients so we try to …

LL: I know that … we might have to educate the client as well.

[Laughter.] Yeah, yeah, you could spend a lot of time putting up an APPG which would probably never meet and there’d be all sorts of … do you have a note of MPs and peers who have been favourable or have spoken about or had anything to do with Fiji?\(^{55}\)

67. At the end of the initial telephone conversation it must have been clear to Lord Laird that AAC wanted to set up an all-party group. However, Lord Laird said nothing in that conversation to indicate that he would be prepared to help establish one; rather, he appeared to want to discourage the idea.

68. Early on in the face-to-face meeting between Lord Laird and AAC they bring up the prospect of creating an APG. DF said, “I mentioned to you on the ‘phone about the APPG. I’ve subsequently had further conversations with one of the directors of the Society and I know you were saying and I wanted to talk to this … with you about this, but I know you were kind of saying your view on APPGs … or I got the impression that you felt they were of questionable worth. But it’s definitely a no … a no … a non-negotiable item for our client. So first kind of thing I was going to say is any help you can give with that?”\(^{56}\) Lord Laird did not reply directly; instead he asked which MPs might be interested in it. He then said, “APPGs are not what they seem” and “A lot of APPGs never meet.”\(^{57}\) Again, at this point it seemed like Lord Laird was if anything discouraging them from pursuing the creation of an APG.

69. Lord Laird then said, “you say to your friend … “you’re an MP and you’re interested in packaging” … So you start the packaging APPG. And I join your APPG and you join my APPG to get the numbers … But then, the point is you need somebody from the opposition … You need someone from both Houses … You need a … to get … to be properly recognised there’s a sort of formula. But the formulas are easily got round, but … The point is … the … if the … if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it. But the point is that it’s actually a waste of bloody … there’s an awful lot of in running and getting an APPG up off the ground. And it’s … err … for the sheer bloody return you get from the … the … the work. It’s not worth it. It’s actually not bloody worth it.”\(^{58}\)

\(^{54}\) Appendix G, page 110.
\(^{55}\) Appendix G, page 112.
\(^{56}\) Appendix H, page 117.
\(^{57}\) Appendix H, page 117.
\(^{58}\) Appendix H, page 118.
70. The conversation stayed on the subject of APGs, with discussion about their reports, chairmen and public confusion between APGs and select committees. Lord Laird then said that the APG would have to take its members on a trip to Fiji. He continued, “And that’s really the time you show them the best bloody time they’ve ever had. You really stick it to them big time … Bond them together and get them all [inaudible]. So when they get back … when the headache’s over and the hangover and everything else and they get back here then all they can remember is a nice fuzzy glow about this south sea island.”

71. The conversation turned to discussion of Fiji more generally, before returning to APGs:

“GT: How did it work … if you’re on another APPG, how did that one get set up? Was that easy to set up, or …?

LL: Well …

DF: Oh, the Azerbaijan one?

GT: Yeah …

LL: Yes … we didn’t have a lot to do with the APPG.

GT: Oh, right.

LL: [inaudible] … err, the APPG does its own thing because it sort of keeps … it keeps ‘em right and we will subsidise a run out to Azerbaijan with the APPG. And, by definition … there’s a hell of a balance to be got at between being seen to manipulate the APPG and manipulating the APPG.”

72. Later on in the conversation Lord Laird said that parliamentarians could spend their entire lives “going on freebies”. A few sentences later this exchange took place:

“DF: Are we talking about getting … this is a, a … a trip to get us people on the APPG? Is that what you mean?

GT: Or to help out, I guess … ?

LL: It’s a bri … I’ll deny having said this but it’s a kind of bribe.”

73. A little later Daniel Mann asked, “could not, correct me if I’m wrong, the APPG be used for … isn’t it possible to get people to come in and give talks? Like, Foreign Office guys and whatever …” Lord Laird replied, “I’ll do that”, though he later clarified that he can arrange talks without an APG.

74. Towards the end of the conversation they again returned to the subject of setting up an APG:

“GT: … quick question, something you mentioned earlier about the cost for setting up APPGs … could you give us an approximate idea?

LL: It … it’ll be very small.

GT: Oh really? OK …

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59 Appendix H, page 120.
60 Appendix H, page 124.
62 Appendix H, pages 142–43.
LL: You sound disappointed.

GT: No, I just got the impression from what you were saying earlier it was going to be quite, erm, substantial.

LL: No, I don’t think so. Well, let’s look at this way … you’re going to try … you’ve got to get these people … the first thing that I would do if you want me involved is to talk to Andrew Rosindell.

GT: Yes …

LL: You know … he’ll get an erection when he hears a lot a bloody APPG about an island [inaudible end to sentence]. And see … see what the thinking is about whether we should start one now … Err … you will get a lot of people who … the opposition and the great unwashed and disinterested, will say, “look at that. There’s a south sea APPG, and look at these guys want to start one for Fiji. That’s just people trying to climb the ladder.”

DF: But would it help if you, kind of, put the word out that there’ll be a fact-finding trip out there? Presumably it will …

LL: Well, yeah … I think we’ve got to, err … do something like that.”

75. In his written submission to me Lord Laird explained that he thought an APG would “be of limited use but they insisted their client was keen … My statement that ‘the point is … the … if the … if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it’ (p7) was said in the context that we would be working together for the client—hence the use of the word ‘we’—and of course it is possible to get an APPG, but I wouldn’t have set up the APPG and, in my view, it would not be worthwhile setting up an APPG.”

Lord Laird correctly observed that the Code does not forbid parliamentarians undertaking trips on behalf of an APG paid for by a third party, so long as it is registered where necessary. He said he was not paid for the advice that he gave, and would not have signed a contract or made an agreement to provide parliamentary advice or services in return for payment or benefit; he would have taken time to consider and seek advice before agreeing to any arrangement.

76. In my interview Lord Laird explained his statement that “if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it” by saying that he thought he was dealing with PR people: “when you’re dealing with other PR people, you say things which are, let’s say, meant to be, perhaps, humorous and meant to be in context of other people of the same industry.” He said that it was a preliminary discussion and repeated that he sees little value in APGs. He said “I think this type of stuff is a waste of time, but I agree that there are some situations with clients where you’ve got to run the client, if you follow my point.” He emphasised that he would have wanted to go away and read the Code and relevant rules before agreeing to anything. He also suggested that, if AAC were successful in creating a “climate of opinion” in favour of Fiji, that would lead to an APG anyway.

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63 Appendix H, pages 151–52.
64 Appendix K, page 166.
65 Appendix K, page 167.
66 Appendix L, page 174.
67 Appendix L, page 175.
68 Appendix L, page 177.
69 Appendix L, pages 176, 178 and 179.
77. It is apparent from all the material that Lord Laird had genuine professional reservations about the efficacy of APGs in general and the idea of creating an APG on Fiji in particular. He did not suggest the idea, and is unlikely to have done so had the client not brought it up. When the matter was first raised he sounded discouraging. However, as the AAC representatives returned to the issue and made it clear that an APG was a “non-negotiable” item for the client, so Lord Laird engaged more with the idea. He said that if the client wanted an APG he’d get one “with a bow on it”. He gave advice on organising trips to Fiji under the auspices of an APG, about arranging for lectures to APG members in the Lords, about the cost of setting it up and about recruiting an MP to it. At no point did Lord Laird question the ethics of setting up an APG: his reservations were about the efficacy of APGs. His position—largely confirmed to me in interview—was that he would not recommend an APG but if the client insisted on one then one has to satisfy the client.

78. Taking Lord Laird’s remarks about creating an APG as a whole, in my view a clear picture emerges: if the client insisted on creating an APG then Lord Laird would help them do so. In my judgment he expressed a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would involve helping to create an APG in return for payment or other reward. As such he failed to act on his personal honour. I therefore find that Lord Laird breached paragraph 8(b) of the Code in respect of his comments about creating an all-party group.

79. As no agreement was finalised with AAC and no further steps were taken by Lord Laird to create an APG I do not find that he reached an actual agreement to accept payment or other reward in return for providing a parliamentary service. I therefore do not find him in breach of paragraph 8(d) of the Code of Conduct.

Alleged provision of parliamentary advice and services, and paid advocacy

80. In Part I of this report I set out the rules that apply to the provision of parliamentary advice and services, and paid advocacy. Those passages are not repeated here.

81. In contrast to APGs, no mention was made in the initial telephone conversation between Lord Laird and Daniel Mann of the possibility of providing parliamentary advice or services. The first mention occurred about a third of the way through their face-to-face meeting, when the following exchange took place:

“DF: How can we get things raised in the House, though? I mean, you know, are early day motions any worth, do you think?
LL: Yeah, but they’ve got to be controlled. Let’s just, let’s just …
DF: I know that’s not within your remit, but …
LL: Does there … why not?
DF: Oh, right. OK.
LL: We’ve a similar thing in the Lords.
GT: Oh right.
DF: Fine. OK. OK.
LL: We can raise whatever we want. Erm … Do any of their senior guys … does the Commodore come over here?”

82. Although the prospect of the clients getting “things raised in the House” should put any member on alert, it is notable that Lord Laird did not address that point directly, and moved the conversation onto other matters.

83. Shortly thereafter Daniel Mann returned to the possibility of raising issues in the House of Lords:

“DF: Well, I mean, again, I mean what I was wondering was: that point which is, completely, I mean, no-one in Britain would have any clue about that point, which is what we’re basically being employed to get out there … that point would surely work well in a … in a … in a debate in the House. If we … if one could be engineered. Would you … would you be able to help with that?

LL: Yeah, but I mean again, you see, I don’t believe, you see, your client would love a debate. Because he likes to read Hansard, page after page after page, but if you run a debate, the minister who’s answering the debate will have been given all the answers from the civil servants. The clever thing in all these situations is to have a sufficient number of people genned up all over the place about … about Fiji that they can either with a flash of their brain suddenly or even have it even organised, throw into another debate …

GT: Oh, I see, a debate that’s not specifically about Fiji …

DF: Yes …

GT: And then bring it up …

LL: Because then you’ll get the minister to make a fluff.

DF: Ah, right. Take them by surprise.

GT: Yeah …

LL: He hasn’t been prepared so he’ll [makes fluffing noise]. Oh, we’ll consider that yes, because that’s what they’ll say, oh we’ll consider that. Then you’ve get them to say that then you’ve got them on a wee bit of a hook, but the point is, look if you run a debate you are holding a bull fight in a circus, or something like that, I’m mixing all my metaphors, so all the anti people and all the [inaudible], they’ll be there.

GT: They’ll be ready.

LL: But if you are an MP and you are … you are a friend of Fiji’s … OK … and you take a few opportunities to say a few words every now and again …

GT: Yes …

LL: Always on some other debate, “oh taking Fiji as an example, Mr Prime Minister …”

GT: Look at the changes they made over there.

LL: Exactly. “Can we not involve the experts from Fiji on this particular topic.” All that … then …” \(^{71}\)

84. Lord Laird is less circumspect in the above exchange. He seemed to stray into advising them on the best approach to getting Fiji raised in Parliament, though he

\(^{71}\) Appendix H, pages 132–33.
went on to imply it would be raised in the House of Commons where, of course, he would not be able to speak.

85. A little later Daniel Mann asked, “can we also call upon you to do some of the bog standards that will just please our client a la raising things in the House?” Lord Laird replied, “Yeah … I’ll not things myself but we’ll get other people if you like that’s the point.” After a short diversion Lord Laird then said, “Well you see the point is, if I take this on, obviously there is, I would be doing it for monetary reward, and I don’t want … I don’t want to be having to unveil that because it weakens the position … Plus the fact that it’s much better … I’d have to list my interests … who I worked for whatever … the organisation is, that’s not a big issue, but if I asked a question I have to declare an interest. Now that doesn’t stop me, we can still do that. That’s fine. But you want more than me. You don’t … you don’t want it sounding as if the only bloody person in Parliament who raises any bloody thing about Fiji is the guy they pay.”

86. They briefly talked about APGs and then the consultants returned to the possibility of Lord Laird approaching other members to raise issues. Lord Laird then said, “Look, I’m not … there are rules, and you cannot break the rules … If you want to break the rules, I would be acting, let’s say, like a consultant who just happens to be in Parliament but not using my position in Parliament because that I think is not, that’s not correct, if you follow my point.”

87. They discuss remuneration and then Lord Laird said, “I mean I do want … just let me underline this point again. I will not be … and you wouldn’t expect, you’re not asking … just so there’s no misunderstanding I wouldn’t be involved in anything other than good and proper … orchestrated, organised lobbying. And putting up a case. And I don’t want … I will not be misusing my position as … I’m just using the expertise gained, if you like, and the knowledge gained.” That was the last direct conversation about the provision of parliamentary services.

88. In his interview with me Lord Laird again stressed that no agreement had been reached with AAC and that “there was no suggestion that payment was being offered to me on the basis of breaking—that I would take payment on the basis of breaking the rules.” He said, “It would be totally incorrect and, in my opinion, it would go over the line if you did something—if I raised a topic in the chamber for a consideration. That is as clear in my mind as it can be.”

89. In my opinion some of Lord Laird’s statements about participation in the House were concerning. He appeared to give advice on the best way to catch a minister off-guard during a debate, and referred to getting other members to raise issues in the House. He made a direct connection between parliamentary business and payment by them. These statements, taken on their own, get very close to expressing a clear willingness to breach the Code.

90. However, I must consider the conversation about parliamentary services as a whole. Therefore, I give due weight to the two separate statements volunteered by Lord Laird about not breaching the rules. In his first statement he said that there are rules and they cannot be broken and said it would not be correct to use his

72 Appendix H, page 137.
73 Appendix H, pages 137–38.
74 Appendix H, page 139.
75 Appendix H, page 139.
76 Appendix L, page 180.
77 Appendix L, page 181.
position in Parliament. In his second statement he referred to not being involved in “anything other than good and proper … orchestrated, organised lobbying.” The word “lobbying” was perhaps unfortunate, but he then made clear he would not misuse his position. In my interview with Lord Laird he seemed to have a clear understanding that providing parliamentary services in return for payment was forbidden.

91. Taking all of the above matters into account, I find that there is not sufficiently strong evidence to conclude that Lord Laird demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement that would involve the provision of parliamentary services in return for payment. He said some unwise things and gave the impression that he was open to the reporters’ suggestions, but these remarks have to be weighed against his statements during the same passage of conversation that he would stick to the rules and not misuse his position in Parliament. I therefore find that Lord Laird did not breach paragraph 8(b) or (d) of the Code of Conduct in respect of his statements about the provision of parliamentary services.
General matters and summary of findings

92. In his written submission and interview with me Lord Laird on a number of occasions raised three points which have general application to the two sets of allegations. I have taken these points into account in reaching my findings. Below I set out the points and my reactions to them; and indicate the weight I have given to them in considering the evidence.

A preliminary discussion

93. Lord Laird on various occasions said to me that the discussion with the undercover journalists was preliminary in nature. They were discussing various options, and nothing would be agreed until a document had been drawn up and signed by both parties. Lord Laird said he would not have signed any agreement that involved a breach of the Code, and having things in writing would enable him to check their compliance with the Code.

94. The above is no doubt true, and is largely common to the other cases arising from the articles in *The Sunday Times* that I have investigated. In considering whether a member has reached an agreement to provide parliamentary services in breach of paragraph 8(d) I examine how advanced any agreement is. However, in considering whether a member has breached the requirement to act on his or her personal honour in paragraph 8(b) of the Code, I take account of the precedent set by the Committee for Privileges and Conduct which makes clear that a member is in breach of paragraph 8(b) if he or she expresses a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement to breach the Code. In that scenario no formal agreement need be drawn up; and a member may be found in breach of the Code on the basis of comments made at one meeting. It would leave a large anomaly in the Code if it could be breached only when a formal agreement is drawn up in writing. If that were so a member could comply with the Code by providing parliamentary services in return for payment, but on the basis of an informal, oral agreement.

“Public relations talk”

95. Lord Laird was a professional public relations adviser for over 30 years. He owned and ran a public relations agency and has lectured on the subject. In his discussion with the undercover reporters he thought he was talking to fellow public relations professionals. In his submission and interview he suggested that his comments had to be taken in that context. For example, when he referred to taking other members of the proposed APG on Fiji to that country as a “bribe” he said he “was joking with those I thought to be in the same profession. To put it another way it was an ‘in’ PR joke.” When he referred to getting the client “with a bow on it” he said, “I thought I was dealing with other PR people. In my opinion, when you’re dealing with other PR people, you say things which are, let’s say, meant to be, perhaps, humorous and meant to be in context of other people of the same industry.”

96. I accept that Lord Laird believed that the undercover journalists were genuine PR professionals and that he may have used certain PR jargon that he would not

78 Appendix K, page 165.
79 Appendix K, page 170.
80 Appendix L, page 174.
use with those outside that field. However, when it comes to talking about Parliament and the House of Lords I think members should be clear what is and is not within the rules. If necessary, that should be explained to others in straightforward language. I do not think it is acceptable for members to indicate that they are willing to breach the Code under cover of professional jargon.

Health issues

97. In his written submission Lord Laird set out two medical problems that he has.81 Appended to Lord Laird’s submission were two medical statements. These contain personal and confidential material so are not appended to my report. At Lord Laird’s request, they will be provided on a confidential basis to the Subcommittee on Lords’ Conduct. At a number of points during my interview with Lord Laird he referred to the stress he was under during his conversations with the undercover journalists, and suggested that his mindset may have caused him to express himself in ways he would not ordinarily do.

98. I am of course sympathetic about Lord Laird’s conditions and have endeavoured to ensure my investigation does not affect them. I am in no position to assess his medical conditions and fully accept what he said about them. His interview with me lent weight to the suggestion that his judgement is somewhat impaired.

99. That said, I note that Lord Laird fully participates in the life of the House in terms of attendance and the tabling of written questions.82 While I have allowed some leeway in interpreting his remarks to the undercover journalists, I am unable to ignore evidence when it is compelling.

Summary of findings

100. In this report I have made the following findings about Lord Laird:

- Lord Laird breached the requirement in paragraph 8(b) of the Code of Conduct to act always on his personal honour by demonstrating a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would involve him helping to create an all-party group at the behest of C&G in return for payment or other reward. But there is not sufficiently strong evidence for me to find that he reached an actual agreement to create an all-party group in return for payment, in contravention of paragraph 8(d) of the Code.

- Lord Laird breached paragraph 8(b) of the Code by demonstrating a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists which would involve him providing parliamentary advice or services to C&G in return for payment or other reward. But there is not sufficiently strong evidence for me to find that he reached an actual agreement to provide parliamentary advice or services in return for payment, in contravention of paragraph 8(d) of the Code.

- There is not strong evidence to suggest that Lord Laird attempted to negotiate an agreement with the undercover Sunday Times journalists that would involve him breaching the rules on the use of House of Lords

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81 Appendix K, pages 163–64.
82 At the time of writing this report, Lord Laird has attended 52 out of a total of 58 sitting days since the allegations were published. He has tabled 100 questions for written answer since then.
facilities. He therefore did not breach paragraph 8(b) or 10(c) of the Code of Conduct in that respect.

- Lord Laird breached paragraph 8(b) of the Code by demonstrating a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement with the undercover *Panorama* reporters which would involve him helping to create an all-party group at the behest of AAC in return for payment or other reward. But there is not sufficiently strong evidence for me to find that he reached an actual agreement to create an all-party group in return for payment, in contravention of paragraph 8(d) of the Code.

- There is not sufficiently strong evidence for me to find that he demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement with AAC which would involve him providing parliamentary advice or services in return for payment or other reward. He therefore did not breach paragraph 8(b) or (d) of the Code in that respect.

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Paul Kernaghan CBE QPM
Commissioner for Standards

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83 Lord Laird has an office in the same building as my office. In 2012 I once spoke to Lord Laird as he was leaving the building and I was entering it. The conversation was limited to a few light social comments. A few days later Lord Laird forwarded an unsolicited copy of his book *A Struggle To Be Heard*. This book has a cover price of £9.99. I acknowledged receipt in writing and thanked him for it. This gift has had no impact on my investigation but in the interests of transparency it is appropriate to place it on the record.
Appendix A: Articles in *The Sunday Times*, 2 June 2013

*Cash for access: Lords exposed, ‘Make that £12,000 a month and I think we’ve got a deal’*

PEERS have been caught offering to ask parliamentary questions, lobby ministers and host events on the House of Lords terrace for cash by *The Sunday Times*.

Three were secretly filmed by reporters revealing their willingness to flout rules banning them from using their power and influence in parliament for paying clients.

Lord Cunningham, Lord Mackenzie of Framwellgate and Lord Laird offered to become paid advocates for a firm pushing for new laws to benefit its business. They also said they could set up an all-party parliamentary group as a lobbying vehicle.

Laird and Mackenzie revealed how some peers were colluding to hide their conflicts of interest from public scrutiny by striking secret job-swapping deals in which they pulled strings in parliament for each other’s clients.

Cunningham, who as Jack Cunningham had been Labour’s Cabinet Office minister, offered to write directly to the prime minister to push the company’s agenda.

The peers offering Westminster for sale can be exposed after this newspaper went under cover to investigate allegations that the Lords had become “infested” with peers acting as paid lobbyists and using parliament as a “business centre”.

Cunningham, a privy counsellor who led the joint committee on Lords reform under Tony Blair, asked for a fee totalling £144,000 a year to provide a personal lobbying service.

“Are you suggesting £10,000 a month?” he asked. “Make that … £12,000 a month. I think we could do a deal on that.”

He told the reporters, who were posing as representatives of a South Korean solar energy company, that he would advise them on parliamentary affairs and become their advocate at Westminster.

Cunningham said he offered “value for money” because he could introduce them to senior figures in all three parties. “Knocking on doors, introductions and getting to see people, including if necessary the ministers—this is part of the package,” he said.

He would be happy to ask questions in the Lords and could “get other people to ask questions as well”. He could also host receptions on the terrace for the reporters and their fake client so they could “mingle” with politicians.

The rules governing the conduct of members of the House of Lords were tightened after *The Sunday Times* exposed peers willing to help amend laws for private clients in 2009. Members were already banned from being paid to act as advocates, trying to influence parliament or hosting functions in the Lords. But the new code of conduct goes further by banning them from “seeking to profit from membership of the House” by offering “parliamentary advice or services” of any kind even if they declared a financial interest, as all three lords said they would.
Mackenzie, Blair’s former law and order adviser who was once a chief superintendent in Durham police, explained how he had devised a ruse that allowed him to host events for paying clients—including on the terrace.

“There is a rule that you shouldn’t host a reception in parliament where you have a pecuniary interest,” he said.

“I thought that’s bloody nonsense. Nonetheless … how would you get round that?”

“I just say to a colleague who has nothing to do with it, would you host a function for me?” He added: “Of course, I do the business anyway, but that gets round it.”

Mackenzie was also happy to ask questions and approach ministers in the Lords to “bend their ear”.

Laird, the former prominent Ulster Unionist John Laird, told the reporters that he swapped the task of asking parliamentary questions for paying clients with other lords.

“Some of the guys for instance in the Lords … I will get to put down questions for me … and then I put down questions for them,” he said.

He laid bare all the ways he and a “coterie” of friendly peers could help the reporters lobby for new laws. “Look, we can run debates, we can take part in debates … put down amendments in debates, holding debates, putting down questions, or writing to the minister,” he said. Laird boasted that the Lords was a great place to do business because clients “go into a state of euphoria” and “it softens them up”.

Cunningham, Laird and Mackenzie all offered to recruit the number of MPs and peers required to set up an all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on solar energy as a lobbying vehicle as part of the deal.

Mackenzie said he was “more than happy” to chair the group, which would be steered by the fake South Korean company, and agreed it would be a “powerful advocate” in parliament for its solar products.

He said his role as chairman could include writing to ministers and hosting functions. “That happens all the time,” he said.

The rules governing the use of APPGs to lobby for private clients are unclear.

Lord Lester, the leading QC and a Liberal Democrat peer, said last night: “The code is clear but it is not enough. What matters more is a culture of integrity, openness, accountability and honesty. That is why the role of the independent press is so vital in exposing public malpractice.”

Each of the peers emphasised that they would declare any payment from the reporters in their register and when advocating solar energy in the Lords or in writing to ministers. Cunningham told them: “I stick to the rules.”

Peers are allowed to speak out on topics they believe in even if they happen to coincide with a financial interest, but cannot do so if they are being paid to push a client’s agenda.

Three hours after the reporters had emailed withdrawing their offer, Cunningham wrote: “I have considered your proposal and have decided to decline it. I do not want any further contact with your organisation.”

The same day he contacted his party whips’ office to raise concerns that he had been targeted by an undercover operation. The whips quickly emailed peers
warning that one of its members had been approached by a lobbying company “that we can find little trace of internationally” and “we are concerned that this may be linked to a prominent national newspaper”.

That evening Mackenzie emailed to say he could not do what he had offered because it would be a breach of the code. Laird’s assistant emailed two days later, after the whips’ warning had been passed to crossbenchers, to accuse the reporters of trying to bribe a parliamentarian. Laird claimed he had known all along he was being set up and had met them only to gather evidence and “have a free lunch”.

Yesterday Laird referred himself to the Lords authorities and issued a statement saying: “I have not broken any rules.” He emphasised that he had “not agreed to act as a paid advocate”. Mackenzie said he had not breached any parliamentary rules or lobbied on behalf of any commercial organisation in parliament.

Cunningham also said he had known he was speaking to undercover reporters during the meeting and had asked for £12,000 a month as a way of “testing their credibility”. He stressed that he had not broken the rules and had not entered into any agreement in breach of the code of conduct.

How to buy a group of MPs and peers

THREE peers were caught on film offering to help set up, in exchange for cash, an all-party parliamentary group as a vehicle for a private company to lobby for new laws.

Lord Laird, Lord Mackenzie and Lord Cunningham told undercover reporters that it would be easy for them to recruit the critical mass of MPs and peers needed to set up a group on solar energy, which could be controlled by a company in South Korea.

It comes after the MP Patrick Mercer resigned the Tory whip on Friday, having been caught allegedly setting up an all-party parliamentary group (APPG) and tabling parliamentary questions for reporters posing as lobbyists.

Mackenzie said he could “certainly” help the reporters establish an APPG on solar energy if they employed him and would be “more than happy” to chair it.

Asked if, as chairman, he could write to ministers and host receptions on the group’s behalf, he replied: “Absolutely, yes. That happens all the time.”

He added that “it would be useful for me to get an ally in the Commons”.

Drumming up enough members would not be a problem, he said, especially if the group promised free food and drink. “You combine it with a reception … that helps get people to come,” he said.

Mackenzie later wrote to the fake lobbyists stating that he could not take part in the proposal to launch an APPG as that would breach the rules.

Laird warned the reporters that they would have to throw money at the group to tempt parliamentarians to join with the promise of free trips abroad. He said he was preparing to take some members of the group on Azerbaijan to Baku, its capital, the following week.

He said: “The point is, to put it crudely, there’s a bit of money involved … because you’ve got to pay for a lot of these guys to go out there and do all sorts of stuff …

“They’re not going to pay for themselves.”
Laird added: “It’s almost a case of some of these guys think of it as, we need an all-party group of one-legged lesbians for Europe because it gives you a better position … It gives a guy a place. Everybody else is a bloody chairman of an APPG, why can’t I be a chairman of an APPG?”

He went on to say he could not chair the group but “tactics-wise” it would be “better” to find an MP to do it.

Cunningham said he could aim to have an APPG up and running by October when parliament reconvenes, if the reporters employed him.

Asked whether he would be prepared to act as an officer of the group, he said: “I think we should leave that unanswered, because that may be almost necessary if the thing’s struggling to get going, but if we could get it going … with me as a member and other chairs that might be better … Because some people will just shoot at the group straight away and say it’s only me earning money.”

Cunningham said he might be able to chair the group, but would need to check the rules first.

A minimum of 20 MPs and peers from all three parties are needed to set up an APPG. There are no clear rules governing the use of groups as a lobbying vehicle for business because they are not formal institutions of parliament. Concerns have been raised that they are used as a back door into Westminster.

‘Getting to see ministers is part of the package’

Three peers have been filmed revealing how they can pull strings for lobbyists in return for cash payments. Insight reports

THE corridors of the House of Lords were emptying for the Whitsun recess as Lord Cunningham tied up loose ends in his office and prepared to head north for an angling break in his native Cumbria.

The former Labour minister—who earned the nickname Jack “Boots” Cunningham during his stint as Tony Blair’s Cabinet Office enforcer—was ready for a break from juggling his role as a seasoned public affairs adviser with life in the Lords. But when a message came in from a Swiss company offering to pay handsomely for his political services, Cunningham did not risk missing the chance by making them wait.

Within a few hours one of new Labour’s biggest beasts had rushed across London to a secluded Mayfair hotel where he shared a bottle of Riesling with two unknown executives and boasted that he was the political mastermind they needed to usher them into the corridors of power.

The pair told him they wanted to hire someone inside parliament as an adviser and advocate to help them lobby for changes in the law that would benefit a solar energy client in South Korea.

“None of that is a difficulty,” promised Cunningham, who was elevated to the peerage after standing down as an MP in the 2005 election. He told the executives that he offered “value for money” because he was connected “across the party spectrum” after 40 years in parliament.

“Knocking on doors, introductions and getting to see people including, if necessary, the ministers—that is part of the package,” he went on.
What Cunningham did not know was that his two interlocutors were undercover reporters for *The Sunday Times* who were secretly filming him as he laid bare the ways in which he would pull strings in parliament for cash.

They had arranged to meet him as part of an investigation into the various avenues through which private business can pay to have a hidden hand in the workings of Westminster. This newspaper began its investigation after being tipped off by a well connected Conservative source that the Lords was “infested” with “subsidised public relations people … cashing in on their contacts”.

One Liberal Democrat peer said: “Many of my colleagues struggle to avoid the temptation to make money in this way and they really don’t understand what is wrong with approaching a minister or raising issues in the chamber on behalf of a client.”

In 2009 *The Sunday Times* had exposed how some peers were willing to amend laws for cash, prompting a crackdown by the authorities.

Peers were already prohibited from paid advocacy, attempting to influence parliament or touting the Lords facilities for cash, but new rules banned them from being paid for any form of parliamentary advice or services to try to stamp out insider lobbying in the wake of the scandal.

This applies even if they declared a financial interest in the subject of the debate, as all three of the lords said they would do if they were paid by the company.

The reporters went undercover to investigate whether attempts to sweep out wrongdoing had failed and contacted 14 peers offering themselves as consultants—five Tories, seven Labour, one crossbencher and one Lib Dem.

Four Labour peers and one Tory agreed to meet them, although the Tory pulled out at the 11th hour after party whips sent out a warning of a suspected undercover investigation.

The reporters found there was no limit to how high up the political ladder Cunningham was willing to climb to push their client’s technology. “There’s no reason why—if we should work together—I shouldn’t write to the appropriate secretary of state or to the prime minister and say, look, this is something I think you should look at,” he offered.

The leading Labour peer, a member of the Privy Council of honorary advisers to the Queen, went on to boast that he had lobbied the previous two prime ministers on behalf of two clients, an engineering giant and a construction firm, although that was not necessarily a breach of the old rules.

He said he had seized the chance to promote the construction company’s green technologies to David Cameron during a chance meeting at Heathrow and the prime minister had told him to “drop me a note about it”. As a result he claimed Cameron had written to Chris Huhne, then energy secretary, and “told him to cooperate with us on it”.

As this meeting was a chance encounter outside the Lords it was not a breach of the rules, but Cunningham used it as an example of the access he could offer. Bending the prime minister’s ear was not all he could do: he would also be a client’s advocate in the Lords. He could ask questions on behalf of the undercover reporters and “get other people to ask questions as well”.

They could also use the House of Lords terrace to mingle with politicians and impress clients if they employed him.
“You’d have to get someone, mainly me if we were working together, to book the thing for you,” he said.

“Then you invite people, parliamentarians from both houses across the spectrum … then your clients mingle with them and meet them and people will be making kind of sidebar appointments to meet for further chats … Done properly and efficiently, that can work very well.”

The rules ban members from receiving “payment or any other kind of benefit, such as an offer of employment based on the ability to provide access to House of Lords facilities”.

Despite Cunningham’s enthusiasm for the proposed task he was not satisfied with the offer of £120,000 a year for two days’ work a month.

“Are you suggesting £10,000 a month?” he asked. “Make that … £12,000 a month. I think we could do a deal on that. And then it doesn’t matter. Monday to Sunday, you can contact me.

“Phone me, send me an email, you can say could I come and talk to somebody, could I invite somebody to the House of Lords for lunch, whatever. All that comes with the deal.”

Cunningham emphasised that he would list the payments from the reporters’ fake client in his register of interests and would declare that he had a financial interest when advocating its solar technology in the Lords or lobbying government figures.

“I declare everything … I always stick exactly to the rules,” he said.

His declarations could not, however, have made clear that he would have been acting as a paid advocate or parliamentary adviser, because both are banned under the rules. Peers are allowed to speak out on topics which they believe are of public concern even if they happen to coincide with a financial interest, but cannot do so if they are being paid to push a client’s agenda.

The new Labour heavyweight was not alone in offering to ply the fake South Korean solar company’s business in parliament. In three days late last month the reporters met three peers who were eager to help for the right fee. The others were Lord Mackenzie of Framwellgate, Blair’s former law and order adviser, and Lord Laird, a prominent former Ulster Unionist.

At a meeting over afternoon tea at the Corinthia Hotel in London, Mackenzie told the reporters: “I’m certainly somebody that can stand up and speak about issues. That’s one of the important skills, I suppose, of being a parliamentarian. I can be an advocate.”

The former Durham police chief superintendent was prepared to speak on behalf of clients in the Lords. He was also ready to lobby ministers directly. “I’ve got access to people that you probably wouldn’t have access to if you weren’t in the House of Lords,” he said.

“I mean, the advantage is when you’re voting, for example … you’ve got the ministers voting at the same time, so you can bend their ear. You can’t get through the civil service normally.”

He said he had lobbied Lord West, then a security minister, on behalf of a security company paying him to act as a consultant. The firm was trying to sell a security system to protect the houses of parliament from “marauders”.

Parliamentary records show that he asked Lord Henley, then Home Office minister, whether he knew that the company had approached Olympic bosses
about using the system to protect the 2012 Games arena last July. Although he declared he had an “interest”, it was not made clear that he was working for the very company selling the radar.

Yesterday Mackenzie strongly denied that he had lobbied ministers on behalf of any commercial interest and said he had not spoken to West about the security firm.

Mackenzie said he could write letters for the reporters’ client and would be more likely to command a reply because of his status as a member of the Lords. “Writing to ministers is a classic example. If the average guy on the street writes to ministers, it rarely gets past the civil servants, but if I write then at least I’ll get a reply. It might be the wrong reply, but at least I get a reply,” he said.

Mackenzie, like Cunningham, emphasised that he would declare an interest in the topic under discussion when lobbying because “the trick of the game now is to be open about what you’re doing”. But his declarations could not have made clear that he would have been paid to act as an advocate or exert parliamentary influence on behalf of a client because the rules do not allow it. Mackenzie also offered the banqueting facilities of the Lords as part of the package.

He said his ability to host events in parliament—including the terrace—was “the main attraction” of being in the Lords: “I’ve chaired, hosted a lot of functions and it’s a great venue. They’ve got wonderful facilities and also people will come.”

He told the reporters: “You’ve got to look around because it’s a stunning place and I do a very mean tour,” offering them the silver package, the gold package or the “Jeffrey Archer package” in which “I just make it up”.

Laird was also happy to mastermind a parliamentary lobbying campaign—"for a minor consideration, of course". The flamboyant crossbencher, who bills himself as a “professor of PR and public affairs”, told the reporters: “All you’re simply doing, really, is using the services of a public relations guy who happens to be in the Lords. It’s like going to a dentist who happens to be in the Lords.”

Over lunch in London last month he explained what that would entail if they hired him. “We can run debates, we can take part in debates … put down amendments in debates, putting down questions or writing to the minister.”

Laird said he would not “cross the line” into what he called “the bad area” and emphasised he would declare the payment the reporters were offering. But he said there was a “soft underbelly” that he could exploit when declaring an interest in correspondence: “What you do is you say dear, whatever it is, Fred or whatever minister, I want to discuss such and such, I do have an interest in this topic. That’s all you have to say.”

He boasted that if he wrote to ministers on the client’s behalf, he was guaranteed a reply setting out government policy in good time, because failing to respond to a peer was a “breach of parliament”.

Laird said he would help the reporters to command a “coterie” of MPs and peers who would do their bidding in parliament: “The key to this is the backbenchers. You go to government and their civil servants will not allow them to do anything … outside the frame of what the civil servants want.

“You need the backbenchers, guys like myself, in both chambers, who hold the government to account … So you’ve got to build up a good lobby there.”

Laird told the reporters the Lords was a great place to host clients because their awe at the setting “softens them up”.
“I find it’s easier to do—particularly with foreigners—business in the Lords, because they get carried away,” he said. “They go into a state of euphoria—particularly the Americans.”

Laird made his derision for many of his fellow peers plain. He told the reporters, “The trouble is in the Lords they tend to be homosexuals”, and joked that his colleagues were obsessed with gay issues and foxhunting: “Homosexuals and foxes are the only thing that fill the bloody place.”

He also poked fun at elderly hereditary peers, saying: “They all speak like 1950s cars—it takes a while to start them up.”

The day after the meeting the reporters emailed Cunningham to withdraw their offer of employment. Three hours later he sent back a terse email saying he would not work for them and wanted no further contact with their company.

Shortly afterwards, around the time the reporters were taking tea with Mackenzie, Cunningham contacted his party whips’ office to raise concerns that he had unwittingly met undercover reporters.

The whips quickly emailed peers warning that a member had been approached by a lobbying company “that we can find little trace of internationally” and “we are concerned that this may be linked to a prominent national newspaper”.

Mackenzie emailed the reporters cheerfully after they parted to thank them for a “very interesting meeting” and offering some more thoughts on the discussion. But by that evening he had changed his mind. He emailed to say he had now checked the rules and realised that hosting “functions in the Lords with a view to promoting the interests of your South Korean client would be a breach of the code”.

He said that these were “complex matters” and “such a financial relationship would be improper” and therefore he could not take the matter further.

Two days later the warning appeared to have trickled through to Laird. His assistant, Kevin Cahill, who had accompanied him to the lunch earlier that week, emailed the reporters’ fake company to accuse them of attempting to bribe parliamentarians. He said he and Laird knew he was being set up all along and had met the reporters to “obtain formal evidence of what you were up to—and to have a free lunch”.

Yesterday Laird said he had referred himself to the “appropriate authorities” and emphasised: “I did not agree to act as a paid advocate in any proceedings of the House, nor did I accept any payment or other incentive or reward in return for providing parliamentary advice or services. I have not broken any rules.”

In a statement Mackenzie said: “I totally refute that I have breached any of the parliamentary rules or lobbied on behalf of any commercial organisation in parliament or abused my position in any way.

“Within six hours of the meeting I sent an email to the so-called representative of the South Korean company pointing out that such a financial relationship with them would be improper and that I would not be taking the matter further. At this point I still thought they were genuine.”

Cunningham, too, claimed he had grown wary of the reporters during the meeting and said his request at the end of the meeting for £12,000 a month—£2,000 more than their initial offer—was to “test this suspicion”.
He emphasised: “I deny any agreement to operate in breach of the House of Lords code of conduct and in fact recall that I made it clear that I would only operate within the rules.”

He also denied lobbying two prime ministers.

Appendix B: Article in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2 June 2013

*Lord is caught in lobbying scandal*

A MEMBER OF the House of Lords is today exposed as the latest senior politician to be embroiled in the growing Parliamentary lobbying scandal. *The Sunday Telegraph* can disclose that Lord Laird, an Ulster Unionist peer and former MP, offered to arrange for Parliamentary questions to be asked in return for a fee of £2,000 a month.

During a joint investigation by *The Telegraph* and BBC Panorama programme, the peer (pictured) said he was prepared to help undercover reporters posing as lobbyists to set up a Parliamentary group, “bribe” colleagues to ask questions and arrange debates on behalf of a client paying him a retainer.

It came as more MPs were drawn into the scandal which has already ended the career of a Conservative politician.

Several MPs from both major parties admitted that they had joined an all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Fiji. They were invited to be members by Patrick Mercer, the MP who took £4,000 from undercover reporters posing as lobbyists, who said they wanted to overturn sanctions imposed on the country due to its human rights record.

Mr Mercer resigned the Conservative whip on Friday after being exposed boasting to the undercover journalists that he had persuaded 18 MPs to join the APPG.

He said they included “several freeloaders that would like to go to Fiji” and one who asked to take his wife.

Today it can be disclosed that the MPs he persuaded to join include Keith Vaz, the Labour chairman of the home affairs select committee; his sister Valerie, also a Labour MP; Julian Brazier, a Conservative; Mark Field, a Conservative; and Fabian Hamilton, a Labour MP who was said by colleagues to have agreed to be the group’s vice-chairman.

None of them is accused of any wrongdoing. Mr Mercer appears not to have disclosed to them that he took payment from lobbyists for Fiji, which is a breach of a ban on MPs undertaking “paid advocacy” on behalf of clients.

Last night it was announced that the role of lobbyists in organising APPGs would be subject to Parliamentary investigation, as part of a wider inquiry into the groups.

The groups can be formed by any MP who persuades 19 colleagues to join. More than 500 exist but comments to the undercover reporters by Mr Mercer suggest that some can be seen as an excuse for trips to exotic destinations involving little or no work.
Robert Buckland, a Conservative member of the Commons standards committee, said: “We will be looking into whether APPGs can be influenced by lobbyists and people with outside interests.

“The inquiry was set up to ensure APPGs are as open and transparent as possible and that they are not misled by the activities of groups that should be more open about who they represent.”

The latest Commons register of interests shows that 60 MPs declared that they had been on trips abroad in connection with APPGs, with costs amounting to £175,000 paid by third parties including charities, banks and oil companies.

Critics say the system lacks transparency and that there is no way of knowing of lobbying companies’ involvement in the groups; or of the public assessing whether the trips are for legitimate activities, such as promoting business overseas, or essentially for free holidays.

Guy Lodge, the associate director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, said: “APPGs need to step out of the shadows. There needs to be far greater transparency about how they operate.

“The relevant select committee should investigate their activities and see whether regulation would improve their accountability.”

The disclosure of Lord Laird’s offer to “bribe” colleagues by offering them a free trip to Fiji will further deepen the scandal.

Fiji’s exclusion from the Commonwealth in 2009, which has cut the value of its export trade, was imposed after a series of military coups. Elections are scheduled for next year but Fiji is viewed as a “country of concern” by the Foreign Office after human rights abuses.

The peer was recording saying: “I’ll deny having said this, but it’s a bribe ... the sort of thing I can say to these guys ... you put that question down now, I thought you were interested in Fiji, would you like to come down to it, you know, I believe it’s quite nice ... I can whisper that.”

House of Lords rules state that peers are not allowed to “accept any financial inducements as an incentive or reward for exercising parliamentary influence” and should act in the “public interest” at all times.

Lord Laird met the undercover reporters at the office of their fake lobbying company where they said that the company’s client—the Society of Friends of Fiji—wanted to set up an all-party parliamentary group (APPG) for the country to raise the profile of the small Pacific island.

Lord Laird told the reporters that APPGs were sometimes not very useful because they did not do much work. However, when the reporters reiterated that it was a “nonnegotiable item” for the client, the peer said: “If the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it.”

Separately Mr Mercer, a former shadow home affairs minister, tabled five questions to ministers and put down a parliamentary motion on Fiji’s readmittance to the Commonwealth after meeting the “lobbyists”. He was paid £4,000 of a contract that he believed would be worth £24,000 by the “lobbyists”.

He did not declare the £4,000 payment in the register of interests for MPs.

He has referred himself to the commissioner, who would be expected to investigate several aspects of his behaviour: setting up the APPG; offering a parliamentary pass to the lobbyists who employed him; asking parliamentary questions about Fiji
that were answered by the Foreign Office; and lodging an Early Day Motion on the country; all without having registered his financial interest.

Senior No 10 sources told The Sunday Telegraph they were “bracing” themselves for a possible by-election, which would risk a victory by the UK Independence Party (Ukip) in a potential embarrassment for the Tories.

Both the Conservatives and Labour are now caught up in the affair as details were disclosed of how Mr Mercer wooed his colleagues to join the group. He invited MPs at 3.30pm on April 30 to the “inaugural meeting” of the all-party parliamentary group on Fiji in Room Q in Portcullis House having previously “signed up” parliamentarians either in person or via email.

Julian Brazier, the Conservative MP for Canterbury, said he joined after being invited by Mr Mercer, with whom he shares a Commons office.

Mr Brazier said: “I from time to time enjoy, very occasionally, doing a nice visit somewhere and if you join an APPG there’s always the possibility you may visit that country.”

Mr Brazier admitted he had been “naive” in not asking Mr Mercer if he was being paid. He added: “I have not played any part in lobbying in any way, shape or form for the Fijians.”

A spokesman for Mr Vaz said: “Mr Vaz was invited to join the group through an email from Patrick Mercer’s office.

“He is a member of several all-party country groups. No visits were offered to him either in the email or subsequently and he refutes suggestions that this is why MPs join APPGs.

“He fully supports Fiji’s suspension from the Commonwealth which should remain until there are free and fair elections. This reflects the views of his Fijian origin constituents.”

Valerie Vaz, the Labour MP for Walsall South, who is Mr Vaz’s sister, also joined. She said last night: “My interests in parliament include human rights and democracy. I view encouraging links and discussion among British parliamentarians as a positive move, especially in light of the ethnically focused tensions in Fiji, the country’s continued suspension from the Commonwealth and the need for a return to full democracy.”

Mark Field, the MP for the Cities of London and Westminster, said: “There was nothing that struck me as being in any way improper. It’s quite a routine thing. I can certainly think of three or four APPGs over the past year I’ve been willing to sign up as a qualifying member for.”

Mr Field added: “He didn’t go into any detail about overseas travel.”

Mr Hamilton, MP for Leeds North East, said: “I’m on a number of country APPGs because I was on the foreign affairs committee for 10 years, so I’m well known as being interested in international affairs. I knew nothing really about Fiji, but it’s not uncommon for MPs to canvass other MPs … to get the APPG off the ground.”

He said he agreed to join the group at Mr Mercer’s request. However, he said he was “not altogether sure” whether he agreed to take up the post of vice-chairman of the group.
Asked about Mr Mercer’s claim to undercover reporters that he was approaching “freeloaders that would like to go to Fiji”, Mr Hamilton said: “I never had any intention of going to Fiji. I think that’s a bit outrageous.”

The group was never formally registered. Mr Mercer would have had six weeks to do so under parliamentary rules.

He also lodged an Early Day Motion urging the British government to “assist in [the] readmission” of Fiji to the Commonwealth, which was signed by four others.

One of them, Jim Dobbin, Labour MP for Heywood and Middleton, said he had signed up “very innocently” and had “no contacts with Fiji”, while another, Mike Hancock, the Liberal Democrat member for Portsmouth South, said it was “one of a number of EDMs” he signed at the same time.

“I must have thought it was a good idea at the time,” Mr Hancock said. “I remember speaking to some Fijian soldiers and they were unhappy with the situation.”

David Crausby, Labour MP for Bolton North East, said he had not been approached by Mr Mercer while another, Alan Meale, (Labour, Mansfield) could not be reached for comment.

Appendix C: Emails from Lord Laird to the Commissioner, 31 May–3 June 2013

Email from Lord Laird to the Commissioner, 31 May 2013
I would be grateful for the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience so that I may brief you on recent attempts to entrap me including one conducted by Snapper TV in relation to the Society of Friends of Fiji.
I believe I am not in contravention of the rules of the House, but obviously it is your view which counts.

Email from Lord Laird to the Commissioner, 1 June 2013
Further to my earlier email, and to be aware, it seems there may be an article in the Sunday Times about a separate scam. I look forward to hearing from you.

Email from Lord Laird to the Commissioner, 3 June 2013
Further to my earlier emails regarding my self-referral of my involvement in the scams undertaken by Panorama/the Daily Telegraph and the Sunday Times, I would be grateful if I could have the transcripts of all the recordings as soon as possible. It is necessary for me to have the transcripts so that I can give a full account.

Appendix D: Letter from the Commissioner to Lord Laird, 7 June 2013
I am writing in response to your emails to me dated 31 May, 1 June and 3 June 2013. I note that allegations against you were published in The Sunday Times and The Sunday Telegraph on 2 June 2013 and featured in the BBC Panorama
programme broadcast on 6 June 2013. I have delayed responding to you pending the Panorama programme.

Your email dated 3 June 2013 makes it clear that you are requesting that I investigate allegations that you breached the Code of Standards. I can confirm that I have received the agreement of the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct to start such an investigation.

It appears on the basis of the articles in The Sunday Times and The Sunday Telegraph and from Panorama that you may have breached the following provisions of the 2010 Code of Conduct—

7. In the conduct of their parliamentary duties, Members of the House shall base their actions on consideration of the public interest, and shall resolve any conflict between their personal interest and the public interest at once, and in favour of the public interest.

8. Members of the House:
   (a) must comply with the Code of Conduct;
   (b) should always act on their personal honour;
   (c) must never accept or agree to accept any financial inducement as an incentive or reward for exercising parliamentary influence;
   (d) must not seek to profit from membership of the House by accepting or agreeing to accept payment or other incentive.

10. In order to assist in openness and accountability Members shall: …
    (c) act in accordance with any rules agreed by the House in respect of financial support for Members or the facilities of the House.

14. A Member must not act as a paid advocate in any proceeding of the House; that is to say, he or she must not seek by parliamentary means to confer exclusive benefit on an outside body or person from which he or she receives payment or reward.

The above provisions are expanded on and supplemented by the Guide to the Code of Conduct, in particular paragraphs 6 to 30 and, in respect of the use of facilities and services, paragraph 101.

I also draw your attention to the seven general principles of conduct identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and incorporated in paragraph 9 of the Code of Conduct.

I invite you to respond in writing with a full and accurate account of the matters in question. A response by 28 June 2013 would greatly assist me in investigating this matter in a timely fashion. I note that you have requested transcripts of your encounters with personnel from the BBC Panorama, The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Times. I am seeking such documentation but you may wish to also seek it on a personal basis.

I attach for ease of reference a copy of the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords and Guide to the Code of Conduct (second edition: November 2011), and copies of two House Committee reports on the use of House facilities and services.

Paragraph 121 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct requires correspondence and evidence relating to an investigation to remain confidential unless and until published by the Committee for Privileges and Conduct.

Waiter: The gent has just sat down here.
Female Reporter: Oh, lovely. Thank you very much. Hello.
Male Reporter: Hi, I’m James. Pleased to meet you.
Female Reporter: Hello, Lord Laird, I’m Robyn. Great to meet you, how are you doing?
Lord Laird: Hi [unclear].
Female Reporter: Good to see you. Hi, good to meet you, you must be Kevin.
Kevin Cahill: I’m Kevin, yes.
Female Reporter: How are you doing? Right. Shall we join you for a drink down here or do you want to go—
Lord Laird: I’m totally in your hands, whatever you say.
Female Reporter: Well, I don’t know. I guess we could go straight through.
Lord Laird: Okay.
Female Reporter: Yeah? Shall we take our things up?
Lord Laird: Okay, that sounds good. I think this place has a good reputation.
Female Reporter: Yeah. Have you been before?
Lord Laird: No, I haven’t actually but I’ve heard about it.
Female Reporter: Yeah, me too. Well, Fiona, James’s PA, booked it for us but she’s got a knack for getting us into nice places when we’re in town. Through here? Thank you. Thank you very much. Do you guys want to go through here? Why don’t you go on the end there, James?
Male Reporter: Down the end so I can hear.
Female Reporter: Yeah, go for it. There we go. Do you gents want to—
Lord Laird: I’ll go over there, yes.
Female Reporter: Take the sofa please, it’s much comfier. Go on round. Thank you.
Male Reporter: [Unclear] sessions [unclear].
Female Reporter: It hasn’t hit?
Lord Laird: So what part of the world are you from then?
Female Reporter: Well, we’re back and forth at the moment all the time. Our company’s based in Zurich. Thank you very much.
Lord Laird: I asked you where you’re from.
Kevin Cahill: We have a [unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh really? Alleyn’s?
Kevin Cahill: A girls’ school?
Female Reporter: The girls’ school there is JAGS but Alleyn’s is co-ed and then there’s Dulwich College which is the boys’.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear]
Female Reporter: The girls’ is JAGS, James Allen’s Girls’ School, that’s the one that I go to.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear] James Allen. She took me on a tour of the estate, the school estate.
Female Reporter: Oh, really?
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear] nice, very nice.
Female Reporter: Very nice.
Kevin Cahill: No crowds. James, where are you from?
Male Reporter: Yorkshire.
Lord Laird: Yorkshire? What part of Yorkshire?
Male Reporter: Pontefract.
Lord Laird: That’s not the—that’s all the areas where they carry ferrets in their trousers.
Male Reporter: Sorry?
Lord Laird: You don’t have ferrets in your trousers [unclear].
Female Reporter: Right now? That’s his party trick.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Male Reporter: No, Pontefract has two claims to fame. One is its liquorice factory, which makes Pontefract cakes, and the other is that we had 52 pubs [unclear]—
Female Reporter: 52?
Male Reporter: [unclear] a few years ago and people would try to go to each one in a day and have half a pint each.
Female Reporter: That would be—what would that be, 26 pints?
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Female Reporter: Not even William Hague could manage that.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh, it’s a bit much.
Kevin Cahill: In Belfast, it’s only 14 pubs.
Female Reporter: Oh all right, 14.
Kevin Cahill: They’re known as the Stations of the Cross. The Catholic Church there is [unclear] 14.
Female Reporter: Are there 14 Stations of the Cross?
Kevin Cahill: There are 14 Stations.
Female Reporter: I always assumed there’d be 12 for the disciples.
Lord Laird: Kevin used to be—in the past he’s been a priest.
Female Reporter: Really?
Lord Laird: His story—can I tell you, this is his story, somebody showed him a picture of a naked female and he left that afternoon, said [unclear]. Sure, [unclear] and then he joined the army—
Female Reporter: Really? Yes, I think Fiona mentioned to us that there was a military connection. Anyway, who did you serve with in the army?
Kevin Cahill: I was in the infantry.
Female Reporter: In the infantry, all right.
Male Reporter: And you’re [unclear]. Is that correct?
Lord Laird: He’s for want of a better word a convert.
Female Reporter: Oh, I see.
Male Reporter: A convert in terms of you were brought up a Catholic?
Kevin Cahill: Yeah. [Unclear]
Female Reporter: All right.
Lord Laird: [Unclear] to give you an idea of [unclear].
Kevin Cahill: Is it my fault that [unclear]?
Lord Laird: Do you know what the definition of an atheist is?
Female Reporter: No.
Lord Laird: Somebody who goes to a Rangers–Celtic match to watch the football. That was not bad; it’s better than the average I think.
Female Reporter: The two of you were—Fiona was mentioning that you guys, you own a battleground together, is that right?
Lord Laird: The battleground, yeah.
Female Reporter: The battle ground, fascinating.
Male Reporter: What’s the battleground?
Lord Laird: The Boyne.
Male Reporter: Oh right.
Lord Laird: The Boyne—the most important battle in European history and the battle that gave you your freedom.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Lord Laird: History didn’t get as far as Yorkshire.
Female Reporter: The Boyne foundation.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh wow. Hello. Yeah, please. Oh thank you very much. Let me give you my—
Lord Laird: This is a constitutional monarchy, doing away with the divine right of kings. This is pretty well why we are where we are today.

Female Reporter: Oh wow, fascinating. What an intriguing—

Lord Laird: What’s the origin of Fox?

Female Reporter: The origin of Fox? Gosh, I don’t know what that is. It’s an old English name I think but I don’t know, I haven’t ever done my genealogy properly.

Kevin Cahill: Charles James Fox was Castlereagh’s [unclear].

Female Reporter: Is it really?

Kevin Cahill: And then there’s a—it’s a Quaker name as well.

Female Reporter: Oh really? Well, my family are Quakers so I don’t know whether that’s—

Lord Laird: They really are Quakers?

Female Reporter: They are Quakers, yeah, yeah. So maybe that’s the connection, I don’t know.

Kevin Cahill: And obviously Lloyd [?] as well?

Male Reporter: Well, yes [unclear] My dad was a McCartney [?] but I don’t know when it goes back to. I have never done the family background.

Lord Laird: Well, I can go back to 1610, although I always have to say to Americans that I don’t mean 10 minutes past 4; I mean 1610 [unclear]. Nowadays with the internet it’s all very easy.

Female Reporter: To do it? I keep meaning to do it; it would be fascinating to find out.

Lord Laird: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: Yeah, I’ve got a—on my mum’s side we have a relative who’s doing some family tree and it is really fascinating, but not on my dad’s side which is where the Fox comes from.

Lord Laird: They’re even more complicated.

Kevin Cahill: Robyn went to a very good school.

Female Reporter: It’s not quite as good as JAGS, actually, that’s the girls’ school. Ours was the—of the three schools in the area, ours was the slightly—

Kevin Cahill: That’s the one Fiona went to as well.

Female Reporter: It is a good school is JAGS.

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear]. It’s way up the list.

Female Reporter: Alleyn’s is pretty good but JAGS and then Dulwich College, which is the boys’ equivalent, are the two really, really good ones and ours was slightly sort of lefty, not quite so—

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: It’s incredible.
Kevin Cahill: The estate owns most of them.
Female Reporter: The school, yeah, it owns everything.
Kevin Cahill: They have property up here in town, Dulwich College.
Female Reporter: Dulwich College, yeah.
Male Reporter: Is it owned by the school itself?
Female Reporter: It is, yeah.
Kevin Cahill: It’s a charity.
Female Reporter: Well, the college owns the—it certainly owns the grounds of the school.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Female Reporter: Yeah. They keep a really tight grip on the area, actually. They won’t have bus routes running through the village and they won’t have a cash point in the village and things because they think it somehow, I don’t know, debases the quality of the area or something. It’s a bit strange living there.
Lord Laird: It’s interesting having a first and second name of things we [unclear] in the first.
Female Reporter: That’s very true. Yeah, that’s very true I suppose, it never occurred to me.
Lord Laird: No, well.
Female Reporter: Yeah, it’s quite an intriguing one.
Lord Laird: Back to the [unclear].
Female Reporter: Yeah, I suppose it’s got Animals of Farthing Wood.
Male Reporter: So Kevin, you’re the special adviser [unclear]?
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Male Reporter: Is this a relationship that goes back a long way?
Lord Laird: Well, a little background [unclear]. I actually met Kevin, I was standing in his field. I thought that was him trying to get the Nobel Peace Prize because everybody who’s standing on their field usually gets the Nobel Peace Prize. It’s actually the battlefield.
Female Reporter: Right.
Kevin Cahill: It was particularly Ireland.
[Waiter asks about ordering.]
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear] The Irish Government is assembled on that field and at the end of the Irish officialdom is this very tall man. I said to him eventually, “You’ve just been made a peer”. I don’t think you were expecting anybody in southern Ireland to realise what peers were.
Female Reporter: No, right.
Kevin Cahill: We’ve been friends ever since.
Female Reporter: Oh gosh. What would you chaps like to drink? Are we interested in some wine or—

Lord Laird: I don’t drink alcohol so I’m totally—whatever, you know.

Female Reporter: Did you say you don’t or you do?

Lord Laird: No, I don’t drink alcohol.

Female Reporter: Gosh, good for you. That’s very virtuous of you, I’m impressed.

Lord Laird: Well, I used to drink until I had a heart attack.

Female Reporter: Oh, really?

Lord Laird: Aye, everything.

Female Reporter: Oh, my goodness.

Lord Laird: I’ve been through every operation you can think of except a caesarean and I heard one day they were warming up to give me a caesarean and I had to bloody stop them.

Kevin Cahill: Two of us came over to see Lord Laird when he was in hospital, and first we had to stay at the door because he was sitting up in bed holding a press conference surrounded by the media explaining [unclear] heart surgery. Standing round the hundred media were all his old constituents waiting for Lord Laird to get their roofs fixed and their toilets fixed.

Female Reporter: Oh, really. So do you do that sort of constituency work, do you?

Lord Laird: Sorry?

Female Reporter: Do you do that sort of constituency work?

Lord Laird: Well, no. I used to be an MP and that was full of constituency work. I do very little of that now, but you do it—it’s more of a kind of—I spend a lot of time trying to get investment into Northern Ireland [unclear]. I’m a big believer, you’ve got all the facilities of the House of Lords, you’re paid for by the taxman. I don’t know if there’s anybody in this entire room that pays [unclear]. We might as well use these facilities, inside the law, we might as well use the facilities to try to bring jobs and investment to Northern Ireland. That is what I do. I’m also interested in Azerbaijan, which may sound odd.

Female Reporter: I noticed that. What’s your link with Azerbaijan?

Lord Laird: You know the Westminster scene and you know what it’s like down there—full of [unclear] and a massive number of committee rooms and all sorts of stuff. I ended up in the wrong committee. I discovered that I was in a meeting of people from Azerbaijan. I took [unclear] the way they were talking so I sort of made a few points to them and then a couple of months later they invited me, the Azerbaijan Government invited me to become the chairman of their European Azerbaijan Advisory Board. It’s a group of worthies, except for the chairman, who is me. We advise the Azerbaijan Government on a lot of issues, or should I be more
specific and say we talk to the Government when they have issues but—

Male Reporter: What issues do the Azerbaijan Government have?

Lord Laird: Anything, yes. I think I spend a lot of time talking about tourism and talking about agriculture and talking about things like that.

Male Reporter: Tourism to Azerbaijan?

Lord Laird: Yeah. There isn’t any. It’s a lovely spot. I might go next week, actually.

Female Reporter: Oh really? They had Eurovision, didn’t they? Was it last year or the year—I remember all the promotional videos and it was really fabulous. They’ve got these amazing towers that look like flames.

Lord Laird: You see, don’t forget it’s extremely wealthy.

Female Reporter: Is it?

Lord Laird: It is. It’s knee-deep in money. It is very wealthy and they don’t build motorways; they build things like—well, the crash barriers are works of art. You’d be afraid to have a crash because you’d take out a work of art [unclear].

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: There’s one city where the roads are made of marble, it’s all the—

Female Reporter: Wow, where do they get all the money from?

Lord Laird: Pardon?

Female Reporter: Where does all the money come from?

Lord Laird: Oil.

Female Reporter: Oil, really?

Lord Laird: Big time oil. The trouble is that like a lot of Soviet states, former Soviet states, the guys who used to run them in the communist regime are now [unclear]. I don’t know if—you’re not old enough to remember The Who but they used to have a song called “Don’t Get Fooled Again”—by the party to the right or by the party to the left.

Female Reporter: I think you’re probably just about old enough to remember The Who.

Lord Laird: Well [unclear]. There’s 10 very wealthy families, very few middle class, and a massive underclass. [Unclear] very interested. When you can’t give them advice, when you start talking to their ministers about [unclear] and they say, “Look, we thought you were our friend”. I say, “Well, I am your friend, I’m giving advice to you.” “You’re criticising us.” I say that a friend is somebody who tells you you’re walking down the street with the wrong shirt and the wrong tie and people are laughing at you. An enemy is somebody who lets you walk down the street. It is 21 years since they were [unclear] in
how tunnel vision they are or how the remnants of 70 years of Soviet [unclear]. They just can’t get rid of it.

Male Reporter: [Unclear].

Lord Laird: Have you much experience of [unclear]?

Male Reporter: No, none at all actually.

Lord Laird: It’s totally fascinating. In a place like Azerbaijan which is only 8 million people and endless amounts of problems then lots of opportunities and things. It is so interesting—it is so interesting to see these guys.

Female Reporter: Yeah, it’s fascinating. I’ve never been up there but it’s really emerging as a kind of—and Kazakhstan and all of those “stans”, they all seem to be—

Male Reporter: It’s a sort of wild west there.

Lord Laird: Well, they wouldn’t really—it’s totally different. I mean, I brought a guy from Belfast over a number of years ago and he gave them a paper [unclear]. Some of the senior civil servants—

[Waiter brings something to the table and there is a side discussion.]

Lord Laird: We went to see some of their senior civil servants in their [unclear] department. These are guys in their late 40s, early 50s. We gave them a file and they read the file and went back. One of them says in broken English, he says, “Look, that’s the policy, we can administer our policy. We can administer our policy as well as or better than any other civil services in the world, but we can’t develop it.” They said, “We’ve never been told how to develop a policy.” They’re not allowed to. They just don’t know. They can’t think out of the box. I mean, these were senior, these weren’t like 18 year olds—this was the senior guy. They have never been asked to think out of the box. It’s totally fascinating.

Male Reporter: I suppose it’s all just handed down by the party and they just do what they're told.

Lord Laird: Look, I don’t want to—as they say in Belfast, don’t get me started. If I start on Azerbaijan, I’ll go on forever, but it’s just so interesting to see the remnants of the Soviet system and to see how they’re tied up. They are a Muslim democracy, that’s if you can [unclear]. We were in a restaurant one time when I’d brought some academics over. I’d been there quite a number of times and we were sitting and one of the academics from Scotland wanted to take a picture, and drew out his camera on his ‘phone. When he took his picture some of the security guys came over and took the camera, took the ‘phone off him, and deleted those pictures because in the background behind us was a table full of girls, women, and you cannot—the security guys say, “You cannot take a picture of somebody else who’s female”.

Female Reporter: Really? Wow, that’s extraordinary.
Lord Laird: I mean there was no suggestion that he did it deliberately; it was like if I took a picture of you now I'd be bound to get this lady at this table here. It was as simple as that. It was no big issue; they just said, “You can’t do that.”

Female Reporter: A photo of somebody else who’s females? That’s—

Lord Laird: Let’s see your bloody licence, let’s see the receipts, let’s see the receipt for it [unclear] let’s see the receipt. All I can say it’s interesting but they are very wealthy; there’s unbelievable wealth beyond—I couldn’t believe it.

Female Reporter: Wow, I’d love to go. I really thought that when I saw the Eurovision videos, I just thought it looked a really fascinating place. The architecture was just really different and interesting.

Lord Laird: It’s all different; everything, it is different.

Female Reporter: It would be very intriguing.

Lord Laird: Different, but the point is we’ve got to keep them looking west because they’ve always looked north to Russia. We’ve got to keep them looking west, because they look west now, but we could lose them again and they’d go back to the sphere of influence. There’s only eight million of them and there’s actually more Azeris who live in Iran than in Azerbaijan. So the whole politics of that area is skewed. It’s tremendously complicated [unclear] and with all that oil, so they have a lot of wealthy people there. They do realise that the oil will run out at a certain point and they’re trying to change the whole thing around [unclear]. It will take a long time to do that. They did tell me at one stage how much they made in tax per day from BP and I can’t remember the figure. Tax per day can be mind-blowing. Half the taxes they put into a savings account, if you like, and the other half they spend on infrastructure [unclear] It’s just—so I had to buy the [unclear].

Female Reporter: Oh, wow.

Lord Laird: I’m sure Yorkshire’s very like it.

Female Reporter: Very like Azerbaijan?

Lord Laird: When Yorkshire gets its freedom.

Male Reporter: It will happen eventually, won’t it? We’ll have our own little parliament.

Lord Laird: With Geoffrey Boycott as the president or, what do you call him, Dickie Bird.

Male Reporter: Yeah, he’s retired now.

Lord Laird: Yes, I know he is. I saw him on TV the other day [unclear]. I always remember him saying, “It’s not my fault he’s [unclear].”

[Discussion with waiter.]

Kevin Cahill: He commandeered a train [unclear].
Female Reporter: Sounds like a ripping story.

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: So you’re out in Azerbaijan next week?

Lord Laird: Yeah, over about a week to 10 days.

Female Reporter: Oh, wonderful. So are you out there often?

Lord Laird: Fairly often. I might have to go back at least once a year and probably twice—I’m back in October. Look, it is very hard to describe. Have you been to Hong Kong?

Female Reporter: I haven’t been to Hong Kong, no, actually, although our founder, we’ve got a sort of bureau there and one of our co-founders, Michael, is from there so I must go out there and visit the bureau, but I haven’t. It’s quite newly set up.

Lord Laird: Hong Kong is a different culture, but this is just a different culture again.

Female Reporter: How about South Korea, is that somewhere you’d be interested in visiting?

Lord Laird: I haven’t, but it’s obviously a very interesting [unclear].

Female Reporter: Yeah, it’s a really fascinating part of the world, actually. Our client is based in a place called Daedeok Innopolis, which is about an hour and a half south of Seoul. It’s just like so space age out there, it’s crazy. I’ve only been once so far but it’s just like—I don’t know, have you been to Dubai? Have you been to Dubai ever?

Lord Laird: No.

Female Reporter: It’s sort of like the marina area in Dubai but with bells on it. It’s just these huge skyscrapers and everything is just chrome and glass. It’s really like a whole new world over there and they’re so unencumbered by the sort of history that we drag around behind us here.

Lord Laird: What are you doing for this company?

Female Reporter: Well, they are basically—we’ve been taken on by a chap called Yang Jungbok here, he’s the chief executive of a kind of IT solutions company out there, but that’s actually a side issue. He’s leading a consortium of investors. He’s set up quite a substantial venture fund to invest in the technologies which are coming out of this research cluster in Daejeon and they have about—I mean, it’s something ridiculous like 900 different research labs and institutes and things all beavering away doing all sorts of interesting stuff with nanotechnology and robotics, nuclear fission—they’re doing everything out there. These guys are investing in the different technologies that are coming out of it and their kind of pet project is a company called Himosi [?] Nano which they’ve just invested—it’s about 20 billion won which is about £12 million, something like that. They’re developing some solar technology. I’ll have to get James to talk you through the technological detail of it.
Male Reporter: [Unclear].
Female Reporter: Sorry, yes. I just couldn’t resist, we just launched off into the world of Daedeok Innopolis, which is—did Fiona tell you about the project when she spoke to you on the ‘phone?
Kevin Cahill: She mentioned [unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh right, okay. She is good, isn’t she, bless her? Shall we get the boring bit out of the way? Are you okay with the non-disclosure agreement, just so we can tell you the nitty-gritty? Is that all right?
Lord Laird: Yeah, yeah.
Female Reporter: Thank you. Right, hang on, let me—and then I can give you all of our stuff. I think that’s [unclear] copy. There we go, one for you. There you go, Kevin, if I give you that too. Now, have—there you go, I’ll supply you with a pen. Have you got one there? So that’s [unclear]. Have you been here before?
Male Reporter: No.
Female Reporter: No, I never have either. It’s quite—it’s a little bit sort of ‘80s, isn’t it? It’s not quite what I was expecting.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].
Male Reporter: [Unclear].
Female Reporter: She’s good though, isn’t she? Gets us into all these interesting places.
Male Reporter: It was quite hard to get a table apparently.
Female Reporter: Is it? Did she struggle? I don’t know how she does it. She seems to have a knack of—
Male Reporter: [Unclear] famous people.
Female Reporter: It’s good for celeb-spotting [unclear] the room.
Kevin Cahill: There’s the manager in the dining room here is a [unclear] and in the evening he comes up to town. He goes from here to Gerry’s, from Gerry’s to Groucho’s.
Female Reporter: Oh, really?
Kevin Cahill: He’s a [unclear].
Lord Laird: Do you want me to sign here?
Female Reporter: Oh, is that okay? Great, thanks. James, are you signing for us? Yeah, thank you.

[Discussion with waiter.]
Female Reporter: Are you okay if we—shall we scan this and get a copy back to you or do you want to sign off a second copy now? There we go, all right, we’ll do that, it saves us a bit of time.

[Discussion with waiter.]
Kevin Cahill: The middle point in his tour uptown. The manager here goes to where we drink and then on to Groucho’s.
Female Reporter: Where do you drink?

Kevin Cahill: At a place called Gerry’s, midway between here and Groucho’s. I took my daughter to Gerry’s and she’s [unclear], it’s an actor and actresses club. I hadn’t a clue it was there, and apparently—okay, do you know the crime series, “DC Banks”?

Female Reporter: “DC Banks”? I don’t actually. Do you know that one?

Kevin Cahill: He was the clown in “Brassed Off”. He’s a tremendous actor. He comes in there every night at six. He has a drink before going on stage. Most of them drink afterwards, and they’ve been thrown out of everywhere else.

Lord Laird: Before you go on stage you have to have a drink.

Kevin Cahill: Then they go to Groucho’s and stay until five.

Female Reporter: Oh, wow. Well, the Corinthia Hotel, we were there having tea the other day and we saw none other than Carol Vorderman, which we were quite excited about on the celeb-spotting front, and also Cerys Matthews.

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].

Male Reporter: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: Insisted on telling everybody this.

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: 2010, yes.

Lord Laird: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: You are outrageous.

Lord Laird: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: Who said that? I didn’t know that? You’ve got some more intel since—

Lord Laird: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: White’s very happy, very good for me. Very happy with white.

Kevin Cahill: Did you ever know Jimmy Simmons? He was balladeer at our university and a lecturer in the English department. He did his training at Leeds, so we got an awful lot of Leeds English from him. But his long-suffering wife tired of him. Jimmy would scour the freshers every year to see who the prettiest was and then he’d write her a poem. They usually succeeded. However, he’d been out late one night and came bouncing back to his house and jumped into bed and his wife had filled it with broken glass.

Kevin Cahill: His lectures for the following two weeks were given on crutches.

Female Reporter: Oh dear, that’s a bit rough.

Kevin Cahill: He did his English degree in the same place James did.
Female Reporter: Oh right. So did he—you didn’t know this character?

Male Reporter: No, he was in [unclear]?

Kevin Cahill: His name is Jimmy Simmons. He was very well-known in Northern Ireland.

Female Reporter: Oh, I see.

Kevin Cahill: But you reckon you don’t know him, then?

Male Reporter: No, I don’t.

Kevin Cahill: Well, there you are. Leeds English department was very famous in our university.

Female Reporter: Oh yes, you were at the same university?

Kevin Cahill: He was a professor [unclear] and I was just a student.

Female Reporter: Oh, wow. What’s he a professor of?

Lord Laird: [Unclear] one of the prettiest, I want to tell you that, and I did not write poetry to him, all right?

Female Reporter: Glad to hear it.

Lord Laird: [Unclear].

Male Reporter: What are you professor of?

Lord Laird: Public relations, with particular reference to public affairs.

Male Reporter: This is because you had a public relations [unclear]?

Lord Laird: Oh yes.

Male Reporter: Are you still involved in it?

Lord Laird: No, no, I sold it on. I sold it to the management.

Female Reporter: Oh, wow. Oh gosh, I didn’t know you could be a professor of public relations and public affairs too.

Lord Laird: There’s only two of us, a fellow called Traverse-Healey, who is up in Stirling, and myself. There was only the two of us, two professors in public relations [unclear].

Female Reporter: Oh, fantastic.

Male Reporter: Do you lecture?

Lord Laird: Again, I’d be interested to hear—that’s probably why I’m so interested in Azerbaijan. What really I didn’t—there’s no point lecturing on the mechanical stuff—sign this, do that. I lecture in how to think out of the box [unclear] the PR guys—you see, to a PR guy this is not a table, this is a cauldron. A PR guy would write this off as a cauldron. This is a cauldron where people’s careers have been broken and made every day, on the day, at lunch and at dinner. This is not a table. This is an anvil—call it an anvil, perhaps, rather than a cauldron. This is an anvil where you career is being hammered out. So I don’t see a table, I see an anvil. That’s [unclear]. Everything’s always a different—things are different. Look, it’s the same with every profession—doctors, solicitors [unclear]. He looks at your case, whatever it is, with a totally different set of eyes.
Female Reporter: Yeah, wow.
Male Reporter: You’ve got to the stage where we are explaining the product.
Female Reporter: Oh yes, I was just—
Lord Laird: [Unclear].
Female Reporter: I’ll catch Kevin up quickly. So I was just explaining to Lord Laird that we’re working for a South Korean company.
Kevin Cahill: Yeah, I didn’t [unclear]. No, South Korea is very interesting.
Female Reporter: They are, it’s a fascinating place. I was just saying it’s incredibly space age out there. Our client’s base is called Daedeok Innopolis, which is a very, very exciting research cluster south of Seoul and they are developing—they’ve got just thousands of scientists and lots of different research institutes working on all sorts of incredibly advanced leading-edge technologies from nuclear fission down to robotics and hyper-miniaturisation. They’ve got sort of tiny military—

[Discussion with waiter.]
Female Reporter: So it’s really interesting and the product that we are working on is a form of solar window, basically, it’s solar technology. What it is, is it’s a solar panel embedded into a glass window so that you have—so that the windows on your house effectively operate in the same way that a standard solar panel would.
Lord Laird: As a solar panel?
Female Reporter: As a solar panel.
Male Reporter: So the window acts as a solar panel.
Lord Laird: [Unclear].
Kevin Cahill: Now, that is innovative.
Lord Laird: Brilliant.
Female Reporter: It’s a breakthrough.
Male Reporter: What’s so good about this is that particular one is that there are quite a few people working on it, but so far they’ve only been able to do it with not clear glass and in order to pick up the light the other [unclear] have coloured windows.
Female Reporter: So a bit like that, actually.
Male Reporter: Whereas the great thing is that they’ve managed to make it 75% transparent—75% transparent is like a clear thing.
Female Reporter: Yeah, like this glass here.
Male Reporter: You can see it, but you can see a window [unclear].
Female Reporter: There’s something there.
Male Reporter: They’ve done that by using organic polymers themselves. They’re essentially plastic—so in effect a photo-active layer of polymers themselves as a plastic, which means than you just
Female Reporter: It’s very space age, like I said. It’s way over my head.

Male Reporter: [Unclear] then it actually—

Female Reporter: Conducts the electricity. What’s interesting about it is that there are several people in the UK doing that sort of technology but they’re way, way behind and they’re still working on coloured glass. The only people who have done anything interesting recently with transparent glass are the University of California. They have got something like 4% efficiency with their product, where—

Female Reporter: And only 60% transparency where we’re on 75.

Male Reporter: Seventy-five, exactly. We’re also 15% cent in terms of efficiency.

Female Reporter: Which is basically—I mean, 15% is the standard energy conversion rate for your average solar installation which you might see on a rooftop, say, but obviously that’s a great big clunking unsightly intrusive thing, whereas this is something which you just build into the fabric of a house and it just looks like—

Male Reporter: If you imagine say a building like the Shard, if you built it like that, you’d have generated a huge amount of—

Female Reporter: Yeah, it would be extraordinary.

Lord Laird: And it wouldn’t look any different?

Female Reporter: No, it would look the same, exactly the same, and it only adds something like—one of the exciting things about the product is that you could retrofit it, so you could in theory retrofit it to a building like the Shard by adding these polymer layers on to all the glass windows, but that would be slightly more complicated because of the infrastructure around—you need the infrastructure built into the window frame to conduct the electricity into the building. But if you were building from scratch, we think it would add about 20% margin to the cost of installing a standard window, so actually when you think about what you’d make back over time in the savings in your energy bills—

Lord Laird: Yeah, it wouldn’t take long to make that back.

Female Reporter: Exactly.

Male Reporter: You probably know that solar technology itself is becoming more and more popular and the Government’s trying to encourage it because they’re trying to meet that renewable target of 20% by 2020. Part of the reason for the [unclear] is that we’re slightly going down in cost but it’s still very expensive. The average household spends something like £7,000 just buying solar panels.
Female Reporter: So that’s the average. The average solar installation is about 3.5 kilowatts and it costs about £7,000.

Male Reporter: Whereas the great thing about using polymers, which are a plastic, is that it’s cheap. I think it’s something like a twentieth of the cost—

[Discussion with waiter.]

Male Reporter: Something like a twentieth of the cost—

Female Reporter: And very, very easy to manufacture.

[Discussion with waiter.]

Kevin Cahill: Do you know who the company’s consultants are? Have they got any Brits?

Female Reporter: No, at the moment they haven’t. At the moment, basically—

Male Reporter: So why, are you offering the services?

Kevin Cahill: No, because what you’ve just said reminds me of what somebody else said to me a while back.

Female Reporter: Oh, really?

Kevin Cahill: He’s a Brit called Harry Kroto. He’s a specialist in carbon and strange carbon structures, and your polymers are related.

Female Reporter: They sound similar. What was the chap’s name?

Kevin Cahill: He was compulsorily retired at 65. Some American institution built a $20 million lab for him. We put him on the old age pension, but Harry’s talked about things like your [unclear].

Female Reporter: At the moment it’s essentially a very specialist research team in the Korea Institute of Energy Research which is developing the product and Himosi [?] Nano is a venture company which has been set up to retail the product. They’re waiting for one more patent and they think that’s due in about six weeks, at which point they’re then ready to hold a press conference and basically go public and tell the world about what they’ve done and then Himosi [?] will kick into action and start preparing to bring the product to market. So we’ve been brought on by Yang Jungbok, who’s the head investor, to build a launch strategy in Europe for the product, because we think this is a great market. Because of things like the renewables directive and the zero carbon homes target, it just seems like really ripe in terms of the policy environment to launch the product. We think the UK is a great place to start, for various reasons. Among them are the fact that we are—we are trying a saving, a renewable energy target, but we’re 25th out of 27 member states in our progress. We’re on 3% renewable energy and we’re supposed to get to 15% by 2020, which is just—

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].

Male Reporter: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: It’s 20% across the EU, but our part of that is 15% because we have such low insulation, I think is the reason for that. So
what we’re looking at is ways that we could be talking to decision-makers in this country about how this product might help the Government hit its renewables target and its zero carbon homes target in ways that will be mutually beneficial for us as a company as well. So one of the things we’re quite interested in, for example, is whether the building regulations could be adapted so that all new builds had to use solar glass—

Male Reporter: And schools.

Female Reporter: And schools, quite, government buildings, social housing, all those sort of things. You could be looking at tax breaks for corporations that use solar glass in their, and all that. We’re at the kind of blue sky phase in the policy development.

Male Reporter: Just looking at the policy environment in the UK—

Kevin Cahill: Mention who your lead investor is. Who is it in your company?

Female Reporter: He’s a chap called Yang Jungbok and he’s—

Male Reporter: He has a company called Any Solution [?].

Kevin Cahill: Who’s he connected to? They’re all connected.

Female Reporter: He is the chief executive of a company called Any Solution, which is an IT services company, and he’s leading a venture company called Daedeok Investments, which is—I think it’s 28.

Kevin Cahill: What’s the relation to—any of the big families, he must be [unclear].

Female Reporter: The big—I don’t actually know. We can go away and find out.

Kevin Cahill: It may not be. There are more entrepreneurs generally in South Korea [unclear].

Female Reporter: He’s a very rich man is Jang.

Kevin Cahill: Usually there’s a family connection. It doesn’t matter.

Female Reporter: We’ll have to look that up. I’m not an expert on the region, so I don’t know. He’s actually—he’s coming over on 7 June for a visit, so if you are interested in becoming involved in the project then it would be great for you to meet him and you can ask him yourself.

Lord Laird: Would he like to come down to the Lords?

Male Reporter: You’ll be in Azerbaijan.

Female Reporter: I’m sure he’d love to come to the Lords, yeah.

Lord Laird: So to clarify what you’re looking for—to boil it all down, you’re looking for the creation of a climate of opinion within government and—

Male Reporter: Yeah.
Lord Laird: You’re looking to create a climate of opinion which will allow the company to have its products better understood by government, accepted by government and by potential clients?

Female Reporter: Yes, exactly.

Lord Laird: It’s a climate of opinion.

Female Reporter: Exactly.

Male Reporter: We’re basically trying to get our heads across the policy environments at the moment, we need advice on that, and it may well be that we might seek to change legislation or we might, for example, just want to have a say in any future development. We’ve really got to understand that policy environment first. What we have here in effect is we’re looking at and mapping out a strategy and we’ve got to go and report back to our bosses.

Lord Laird: Obviously it goes without saying that anything—one of the very good rules down here is that anything that reduces this country’s dependence on overseas oil and gas is very, very important, not just for the financial but for the foreign policy. You don’t have your own foreign policy when your oil and gas is being piped through a whole series of other countries. Your foreign policy depends on having [unclear].

Male Reporter: The Azerbaijanis?

Female Reporter: Yeah, so that’s the sort of insight that is quite useful for us, because what we want to do is that we think the best way probably of trying to influence opinion in this country is to engage with parliamentarians at a grass roots level. We’re talking to MPs and talking to peers and sort of trying to get that climate of opinion to filter up from the bottom rather than just going in and attempting to get a meeting with the Prime Minister or something like that. It just seems like he’s not going to listen, but if his MPs and his peers are telling him this is really interesting—

Lord Laird: Well, yeah, the key to this are the backbenchers. You go to government, and their civil servants will not allow them to do anything outside, if you can get away with it, anything outside the frame of what the civil servants want. You need the backbenchers, the guys like myself, in both chambers, who hold the Government to account and have a way to hold the Government to account and putting these things to government. So you’ve got to build up a good lobby there, a good understanding. Now, what you’ve got is something that is sexy and fashionable. Sexy and fashionable.

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: So it’s, er—It shouldn’t be that difficult. I mean, it’s difficult, but it shouldn’t be that difficult. It’s actually one of the easier ones around.

Female Reporter: Yeah. Well, that’s brilliant.
Kevin Cahill: And it plays to policy. That’s important.

Female Reporter: That’s sort of where we were hoping that you could potentially help us.

Male Reporter: Well, we like to have—building up [unclear] at the moment.

Female Reporter: That’s right, yeah. That’s what I was saying.

Male Reporter: Which is one of the reasons. One of the things we were thinking about was an all-party parliamentary group on solar energy.

Lord Laird: Have you looked to see if there is one?

Male Reporter: No.

Female Reporter: There isn’t one.

Lord Laird: There is not one?

Female Reporter: There’s an all-party group on climate change, but not on solar energy specifically. What we were sort of wondering was whether—what we’re looking to do is to engage probably one consultant or adviser who would work with us. What we’d like ideally is a parliamentarian, and if we can have a parliamentarian of your stature, that would be incredibly prestigious for us and very exciting, basically to help us understand how to create that climate of opinion that you’ve talked about and how to engage with your colleagues, that sort of thing.

Lord Laird: Okay, somebody like myself, there’s no problem, but we need a support team of other parliamentarians because it’s not good tactically—it’s not tactically good for one person to have decreed because I would have to declare this. I mean, obviously if I’m working for you guys I have to declare it, which is fair enough. I mean, that’s the rules.

Female Reporter: Of course. That’s the rules, yeah.

Lord Laird: So sometimes I might handle things about Azerbaijan and declare it, or sometimes I’ll get somebody else to deal with it. That’s fine.

Female Reporter: Right. So if you get someone else to deal with it obviously there’s less of a direct—

Lord Laird: We’ve got to get a coterie of people there. Don’t put too much faith in an all-party group. It’s important, it’s good, it’s necessary, all that sort of stuff, but it’s almost a case of some of these guys think of—you know, we need an all-party group of one-legged lesbians for Europe, that sort of stuff, because it gives you a better position, because you’ve got to get so many people in from various different parties, from both Houses, and this type of thing, and it gives a guy a place. Everybody else is a bloody chairman of an APPG, why can’t I be a chairman of an APPG?

Kevin Cahill: About time, yep yep yep.
Lord Laird: We do have that, but it’s better to have one than not have one. But we are going to—it is going to be necessary to—in terms of the APPG, you’re going to have to do things with them. I mean, we’re taking some of the APPG, some of the Azerbaijan APPG with us to Baku next week. You take them out and look after them, those sort of things.

Female Reporter: Did you help them set that one up, the Azerbaijan one?
Lord Laird: No, there was one but it was half asleep.
Female Reporter: All right.
Lord Laird: A lot of those APPGs never meet after the first meeting.
Female Reporter: Really?
Lord Laird: The point is that—I was going say the point is that, to put it crudely, there’s a bit of money involved, you know, because you’ve got to pay for a lot of these guys to go out there and do all sorts of stuff, who knows what.

Female Reporter: We’d have to pay for them.
Lord Laird: You do, yeah. Well, you pay for them or at least somebody else pays for them. They’re not going to pay for themselves.
Female Reporter: No, of course not. We wouldn’t expect them—
Lord Laird: It’s got to be—
Male Reporter: It’d be great to get them all out on a trip to South Korea.
Kevin Cahill: I was very tempted to think—do they still do the photo albums? Okay, if you do an official visit to South Korea, they’re amazing. You know, you’re met by the [unclear]. You were here with me that time. They did photographs, so you get this album—you’re given their usual goodies, but you’re given this album with pictures of all the countries visited. South Korea is very interesting.

Female Reporter: That may be a good idea.
Lord Laird: Yeah, but—
Female Reporter: We’ve got a really, really good budget for that sort of thing.
Male Reporter: Do you think you might be able to help us set up a parliamentary group?
Lord Laird: Oh, I would have thought so.
Female Reporter: Yeah? Brilliant.
Male Reporter: Would you be able to say, for example, be the chair of it?
Lord Laird: No, I couldn’t. It’s best me not being a chair of it. Tactics-wise, it’s best to get a chair from the House of Commons. The Lords, they don’t allow [unclear].

Female Reporter: And also—I don’t know whether—we should say that in terms—I think we mentioned that the remuneration is quite generous. We can talk about that later, but obviously we’d want to pay you well because we’d really appreciate all your efforts. We also have a good budget for things like possibly a
trip to South Korea to offer the other MPs and the peers and things like events and things like that that we’d like to do just to extend the hospitality and try and, you know, encourage engagement. So—

Lord Laird: All that is very, very possible. What we have to do, so everybody knows what they’re doing, is work out a document—it doesn’t have to be a very long document—of what are targets are and the message that we’re trying to get there, so we know exactly what our targets are.

Female Reporter: That would be great. That would be brilliant. So once we’ve done that—I mean, what we’ve been asked to do by our founders, Jen and Mike, is to sort of have a chat with you and see what you think, the different ways you might be able to help us, and then we’ll go and explain to them. We’ll say, for example, one of them is an all-party group and we would want to run a trip and that sort of thing, and if there’s anything else that you could do, as I say, so we can explain to them what the benefits are of engaging someone like you in terms of things that—I mean, I really don’t quite know how it all works. Are there other things that you could do as an adviser to us or a consultant for us in terms of, say, if we were looking at wanting to create that climate of opinion, or we wanted to be pressuring for the building regs to be changed?

Male Reporter: For example—

Female Reporter: Like debates, or—I don’t know?

Male Reporter: How do we establish this—I mean, all-party groups is one of them, but how do we establish this coterie of MPs to support our cause?

Female Reporter: Mmm, that’s a great idea.

Lord Laird: And don’t forget the peers. It’s not a case of having a guy sort of going around building, thumping things out on behalf of yourself. It’s people who have a level of knowledge. The amount of stuff you get every day, the post you get every day, the e-mails you get, it’s unbelievable. So what you’ve got to do is, you’ve got to pick out those guys who are interested. There is an all-party group on excellence in building.

Female Reporter: Is there? Ah, well that would be very helpful.

Lord Laird: I mean, so it’s keeping that as a [unclear]. And even in South Korea, you know—

Female Reporter: We wondered about teaming up with them to do a trip, say.

Lord Laird: I’ll do a bit of a research to see what the thing is [unclear] and it’s getting, let’s say, a collection of people together who are interested. These things will be manufactured, obviously, in South Korea?

Female Reporter: We think so, although we’re—

Male reporter: That’s a moot point. There isn’t quite the [unclear]. Because they regard the UK as their first market, they see it as a sort of
useful bridge between Europe and the United States. The natural place, say, in Europe to go would be somewhere like Germany, because Germany is actually, in terms of solar PV, way ahead of the rest of the world. A third of all solar panels are in Germany. So it’s not a good market to go for because it’s already quite saturated in that way. So they see UK as important, so therefore they are giving consideration to actually manufacturing here in UK.

Female Reporter: Or even perhaps part of the supply chain being in the UK, or—there are various different options, basically.

Lord Laird: Well you see, you’re beginning now to talk a different language, because you’re building jobs. That’s another string to the bow, an important string to the bow. So you talk about jobs. You’ve then got part of the job home.

Female Reporter: Right.

Lord Laird: That’s like the [unclear] ice cream and a child. The mother has part of the ice cream but she will only give it to one child. But she gets them all behaving well waiting on the part.

Female Reporter: Oh, I see. So is that as in whose constituency the jobs would go to?

Lord Laird: You’re putting it even more crudely than I am. I was also thinking of at least Scotland or Wales or Northern Ireland or any of them.

Female Reporter: Oh I see.

Lord Laird: Even Yorkshire could—


Kevin Cahill: It’s more likely to be somewhere like south Wales or somewhere like that.

Female Reporter: Is it the sort of thing where if you were thought to, I don’t know, put the manufacturing plant in the constituency of a particular minister or something, that they might—I don’t know, it just occurred to me as you say it, that—

Lord Laird: Oh, I mean, you might think that I wouldn’t be able to comment. [Laughter] Human nature is human nature. That sort of thing has been done before, but you’ve got to look at the—it’s not just a case of saying, “We want to build a factory in Yorkshire, and you’ve got to look at the political implications.” The thing is, what it must never do, and I’ll never do, is cross the line into, you know, sort of the bad area. Because there are things that we can’t do and I can’t do. That’s totally acceptable. It is a bit of level playing field, which is fine. It’s just that we happen to know the way around the playing pitch, so you’re in a slightly better position. So we’ll always be very careful on that line, but, I mean, it is quite legitimate to scratch your head and wonder where you’re going to put a factory, and who you talk to about the factory.
Female Reporter: Yeah, yeah.
Male Reporter: Of course, yes.
Female Reporter: Absolutely.
Male Reporter: And therefore you could have several people interested, couldn’t you?
Lord Laird: Oh yes.
Female Reporter: See, we could be sort of—
Lord Laird: That’s a very good idea. I never thought of that. [Laughter.]
Female Reporter: Oh, so if we were saying to the MPs, “We might be—we’re looking for a place to build a factory, will you become, I don’t know, become a member of our group?”, for example. Is that—that’s the sort of thing we could use just to get them interested.
Lord Laird: Yeah, well, forget the [unclear]. That’s only ever [unclear]. It’s not like the scouts where we’ll have to turn up every Friday night or something.
Female Reporter: So this is a more informal sort of alliance of—
Lord Laird: Very informal. The point is, it’s done on a—Some of the guys, for instance, in the Lords where I will get them to put down questions for me.
Female Reporter: You get them to put down questions?
Lord Laird: Yeah, and then I put down questions for them. And then what you do is sort of—
Female Reporter: And what’s the reason for getting them to do it and not doing it yourself?
Lord Laird: Well, because if I’m employed by you good people and I put down a question which is related to you guys making money, I’d have to put a—I can do it, but I have to put an “I” beside it because I’ve got an interest.
Female Reporter: Oh I see, and that draws a lot of attention and—
Lord Laird: Well, it’s fine, and you get the same answer. It’s better not to do it that way. It’s better to do it through another guy, and then a—
Male Reporter: Is this in relation to Azerbaijan?
Lord Laird: No, anything, anything.
Male Reporter: Or in relation to other clients?
Lord Laird: Anything, anything. Anything at all where you’ve got a financial interest and the answer could be [unclear]. They’re not opposed to doing it, you’ve just got to signal that this is what is happening if it’s of benefit to someone.
Female Reporter: Yes. That’s very—So this is the sort of thing that we just would have no idea how that sort of thing works. It’s so helpful to have someone who’s an expert explain.
Lord Laird: Yeah, and that’s totally legitimate. All that’s totally legitimate. Nobody—I’d be very careful. We have to be careful, because I mean, I’m not—I mean, you wouldn’t expect me to cross the line. I mean, this is rather—I wouldn’t cross the line.

Female Reporter: No.

Lord Laird: I know you’re not saying I would cross the line, I know.

Female Reporter: You’d be—no, well, you have to be really careful to—Of course, and we wouldn’t want to do anything that would in any way put your reputation on the line, and it would reflect badly on us. But that sort of thing is a great around it, isn’t it?

Lord Laird: There’s a lot of stuff that can be done. I mean, it may be, the South Korea all-party group, we’d be ensuring that on their next visit to South Korea there’s an afternoon spent checking this out.

Kevin Cahill: [unclear] the APPG that’s going to the country, it’s now specific. You know, it’s a [unclear]

Female Reporter: Okay. We wondered about teaming up with them, I don’t know, because they have an existing membership, obviously, so they might—

Male Reporter: So you’re saying that there’s an afternoon spent—

Lord Laird: I’m just saying that—I’ve got to check out the status—is there a South Korea APG?

Female Reporter: There is, yeah yeah.

Lord Laird: And have they been out there and are they going out there, and the next time they’re going out there would they spend an afternoon with your guys?

Female Reporter: Yeah, which would be great.

Lord Laird: Perhaps your guys might tour the factory and just happen to be there at dinner time to give them their dinner.

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Kevin Cahill: Are the South Korean dinners still eight courses?

Female Reporter: They do a great line in boiled cat. Thank you very much.

Kevin Cahill: Have you stayed in the Shilla Hotel?

Female Reporter: In the Shilla, no, actually. I’ve never stayed in Seoul. I’ve only ever stayed in Daejeon for my sins.

Kevin Cahill: In a putrid [unclear].

Female Reporter: Ah, that’s wonderful.

Kevin Cahill: James, how does somebody who only got an E in English in Leeds get to South Korea? The potted version will do fine.

Male Reporter: Oh, because I went [unclear].

Kevin Cahill: And so did I.

Female Reporter: Ah right. So what are the—there’s a possibility that if we were to sort of engage you, you might be able to help us with an
APPG. [To waiter: Thank you very much.] And how would you—you wouldn’t want to chair it, but would you—you’d be able to help us find sort of members who might—Because I think, am I right in thinking you need to get 20 people?

Lord Laird: How many?
Female Reporter: Is it 20 you have to get to sit on it so you can set one up?
Kevin Cahill: With an APG it’s six.
Female Reporter: Six?
Lord Laird: Six. But they’ve got to be cross-party and cross-chamber.
Kevin Cahill: So it makes it tricky, yes. Each party has three and three.
Female Reporter: Oh I see, okay. So that’s a bit—so you can help us with all of that. And would you be able to be an officer of the group, do you think, or—?
Lord Laird: If necessary, if necessary.
Female Reporter: Yeah? Okay, that will be great. I think that’s something we’d really like to do.
Kevin Cahill: The thing is there is getting some public affairs company to do the secretariat. I don’t know whether that—
Female Reporter: Just because we’re not here sort of often enough.
Lord Laird: Okay, um—
Female Reporter: We need to do something that’s sort of—There’s a few companies who seem to provide secretariat for a few groups already, so we wondered if that was a good way of doing it.
Lord Laird: Yeah. Let me check to see what sort of things are likely to be involved. I mean, there’s not a great deal involved. Let me come back on that one, would you?
Female Reporter: Okay, thank you. And what about—? So things like putting down questions is something you might—you wouldn’t want to do personally, but you might be able to find a friend who could do that?
Lord Laird: No, I wouldn’t. But I mean the point is, I’d talk to other people who are interested, and they’d put down questions, so that’s not a problem.
Female Reporter: Yeah. That could be useful, because I think there are—it just seems to me it’s quite a good way of kind of raising a bit of awareness about, that there’s an issue here and also getting information, I think.
Male Reporter: Yeah, it’s a great way of finding information from the department.
Female Reporter:—from the department.
Male reporter: Which is why you do it. Or what the minister’s thinking.
Female Reporter: Yeah. So what other sorts of things would you recommend that we were thinking about doing at that kind of level?
Lord Laird: Well, at some stage somebody from the organisation could do a lecture in the Lords about alternative fuel, and um—

Female Reporter: In the Lords?

Lord Laird: Yeah.

Female Reporter: That's a very good idea.

Male Reporter: Would you organise that? You would you be able to organise that?

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: We organise them at least once a month and sometimes twice a month.

Female Reporter: Really?

Kevin Cahill: Have you ever heard of supercomputers?

Female Reporter: Supercomputers? Is that what, like, the sort of database, like the—

Kevin Cahill: No. A supercomputer is the biggest, fastest machine on earth at any given time.

Female Reporter: Right.

Kevin Cahill: It's a really simple definition, and John hosted with the room, the man who is the supercomputer expert in the whole of Europe, to give a talk, a fabulous talk.

Female Reporter: Oh wow. Is he a client?

Lord Laird: No.

Female Reporter: No, just somebody you were—

Lord Laird: Back to the point I made earlier about—The point of these rooms, it doesn't cost a penny to have some of their rooms. They're paid for by the taxpayer. We run a lecture, Kevin gives me a hand. There are a number of us who run these lectures. I host them all. I think the last one we had [unclear]—the one you were at.

Kevin Cahill: No, it's brilliant, it's on fracking. You know, anything that's [unclear] really important. It's grabbing policies and in Europe. [Unclear] level we think—distribution organisation, maybe a manufacturing plan. I feel it's the job of Parliament to give people, things like that a platform, and Lord Laird has done that. It's wonderful. [Unclear] with a computer is—

Female Reporter: Oh, fabulous.

Lord Laird: Even fashion.

Kevin Cahill: Yeah.

Lord Laird: We had our biggest turnout ever, over 90 for fashion.

Female Reporter: Sounds a bit more up my street than the fracking.

Lord Laird: One of my friends I think [unclear] to go around and tell a lot of people that the mannequins there are not wearing very
much, and we got a big turnout for slightly the wrong purposes.

Kevin Cahill: Supercomputers do a slightly different [unclear].

Female Reporter: Yes, I can imagine. So they could—is it sort of like a lecture series that you—

Lord Laird: Yeah.

Female Reporter: And it’s not associated with a group, it’s just something that you do in the committee?

Lord Laird: No, we can run them ourselves.

Female Reporter: So what you could do is you could invite, say—oh thank you.

Kevin Cahill: Lord Laird does the same in the House of Lords.

Female Reporter: Oh, so this is the equivalent in the Commons? That’s really—

Kevin Cahill: The House of Commons does things like this.

Female Reporter: Oh wow. And so you would, we could get, say, one of our for of head—the technical head of the lab, say—

Kevin Cahill: I need that.

Female Reporter: Oh you need that, sorry. We could get the head technician, say, to come over and give a talk on solar PV technology in the Lords, and so providing his English is good enough—I was just thinking we could get Thurein, you know, the head technician, we could get him to come over and—as long as his English is good enough.

Lord Laird: Tactical-wise, you guys are not against oil. What your guys say is that it’s reasonably self-sustaining.

Female Reporter: Yes, absolutely.

Lord Laird: Because I feel very strongly [unclear].

Female Reporter: Do you?

Lord Laird: which I think is a good thing. That’s part of your song. You’re singing the song that stuff should be made and done in the UK.

Female Reporter: Um.

Kevin Cahill: Yes, and the two things aren’t exclusive, because you know, even if the UK hits the Department for Energy and Climate Change targets, you’re only talking about 30% electricity, and that’s even if they hit the target [unclear].

Female Reporter: We’re looking at a microgeneration level as well to begin with anyway, so it’s more sort of domestic than industrial.

Lord Laird: The more we’re not dependent on outside countries for our energy, the better it’s going to be for everyone.

Female Reporter: So we’d be part of that energy mix, but not obviously—we’re not looking to bounce oil.

Lord Laird: You are trying to produce indigenous energy, for want of a better word.
Female Reporter: Exactly.

Lord Laird: —in the UK, but you’re not against oil.

Female Reporter: No, I think you’re right. I think that’s tactically really important, because we don’t want to make enemies.

Male Reporter: I assume that fracking is one of many useful things that, again, that fracking will produce quite a lot of gas, and at some point will be part of an energy strategy, will it?

Lord Laird: It’ll be a while before fracking is accepted, but we’ve got to start somewhere, and it will be very good. You’re part of the [unclear].

Female Reporter: Exactly, microgeneration is where we want to start, rather than on an industrial scale. We’re in a different part of the market I think. Do you have clients?

Lord Laird: I’m the chairman of the Earth Foundation. I’m the chairman of that adviser board. I mean, that’s the sort of—I’m a retired PR guy, but I like the sort of challenge you talk about and I’d like to be able to help you guys, for a minor consideration, of course.

Female Reporter: Absolutely. Now how does that work? Do you have a fixed fee or do you—?

Lord Laird: The calculation is for me to work out how much sort of time it’s likely to take up.

Female Reporter: What we’d sort of thought about was—it’ll probably be the kind of, on a retainer basis, if that works for you, which we would assume would be about, I don’t know, one or two days a month, something like that, and—

Male Reporter: How does that fit in with your other commitments? Would that be okay or would that—?

Lord Laird: Well, it wouldn’t be a continuous day, it’d be equivalent of two days.

Female Reporter: Equivalent, exactly. So yeah. We’re not clock watchers, so that would be the sort of rough basis of it. And then, then we had a certain amount set aside for that and then we’d like to pay a quarterly bonus based on, as you said, once we’ve drawn up what our clear targets were based on how we felt we were progressing towards particular goals. And, um, then we want—I mean it might be that there were additional things that you might help us with which we might want to pay you sort of additionally or separately for.

Lord Laird: Yep.

Female Reporter: Say, for example—I don’t know. I wonder whether the actual process of setting up a party group, there might be quite a lot of work involved in that at the outset, so you might have a kind of additional payment for that piece of work and then—

Lord Laird: Yeah, let me come back to you on that, as they say. If we get—you’ll understand it, because I mean we’re all very sort
of crazy in our minds after the expenses scandal and all sorts of stuff. But if it gets anywhere near the red line, I’ll put a flag up. Do you know what I mean?

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: What we’re talking about here is not because—All you’re simply doing, really, is using the services of a public relations guy who happens to be in the Lords. It’s like going to a dentist who happens to be in the Lords.

Female Reporter: Quite, well exactly, and you have to be able to sort of, you know—

Lord Laird: That doesn’t mean—

Kevin Cahill: What most of the public don’t understand is that peers are not paid.

Female Reporter: Are you not paid?

Kevin Cahill: No.

Female Reporter: I didn’t realise that. So what, you just, you work for nothing in the Lords?

Lord Laird: We get expenses, that’s all.

Female Reporter: Oh really? Then you spend—how does it—

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear].

Female Reporter: That’s just sort of not—

Kevin Cahill: It’s constant. Most of the hereditaries were incredibly rich, so rich that when Maggie summoned them for the coal tax, two of them turned up [unclear] asking where the chamber was. As in, not only were they so rich they didn’t need to [unclear], they didn’t know where the House was.

Female Reporter: Goodness.

Kevin Cahill: The modern House is different, but this strange thing of not paying [unclear].

Female Reporter: Well, that’s just, I mean, crazy, because—You’ve got to carry on your business then.

Lord Laird: Yeah, it is a scandal in the sense that in the old days you had to be somebody of private means in order to the member of either chamber, and it’s gone back to that now as a result of expenses scandal.

Kevin Cahill: Now it’s regularly—

Female Reporter: Right.

Lord Laird: Even in the Commons. It’s a hell of a thing. Coming to be a Member of Parliament is a hell of a job. It’s a hell of an expensive job, and you really need another income, you know, nowadays. It’s gone backwards. We’re now being governed by—it has to be people with private incomes, another job. Also [unclear]. And that’s all down to the expenses scandal.
Female Reporter: So before you were able to support yourself using the allowance.

Lord Laird: Yeah. The point is, after the expenses scandal, more money is spent on scrutinising what goes on in Westminster now than was paid out. I mean, it’s cost the Government, cost the taxpayer, infinitely more. The building is full of accountants totting and ticking. We lost a lot of options, but they start totting and ticking and writing us letters about this and that matter.

Female Reporter: I was going to say that I take what I read in the papers with a pinch of salt anyway, but I notice you’re an investigative journalist yourself aren’t you, so—?

Kevin Cahill: Most of the Tory MPs who were knocked out in the expenses scandal have private incomes.

Female Reporter: Really?

Kevin Cahill: Very, very—people with the lowest [unclear] MPs with no income [unclear] There is a very—there is a very—

Female Reporter: How strange.

Kevin Cahill: [unclear]. I worked in the Commons, and I joined him. I met all my old Labour friends. It was lovely. If you have people who really believe [unclear] as—I’ll tell you, that story about going to see him on his sick bed with all his old constituents standing there.

Female Reporter: And they’re all there.

Kevin Cahill: [unclear] “John, can you get the bloody—[unclear]”.

Female Reporter: I didn’t realise the Lords did that sort of constituency work.

Kevin Cahill: You never lose your constituents.

Lord Laird: You know the building, right? You know the Palace of Westminster?

Female Reporter: No, I’ve never been in, actually, I don’t know. James, have you been in?

Lord Laird: Well, the first thing you’ll have to do is come down.

Female Reporter: I’d love to.

Lord Laird: Yeah.

Female Reporter: That’ll be really exciting to see.

Male Reporter: It would be quite useful to be able to take clients there.

Lord Laird: Yeah.

Kevin Cahill: You’ll never see a place like it. [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: Really? Is it extraordinary?

Lord Laird: The point is, you wouldn’t call them clients. They’re just friends.

Female Reporter: And we can come along? Oh wow, thank you. How exciting.
Lord Laird: [unclear] They’re friends, they’re just friends.
Kevin Cahill: I’ll have to take you in, but I’ll arrange for you—
Female Reporter: Oh thank you very much.
Kevin Cahill: Thought you might be busy.
Female Reporter: I need to double check that, but this might be really interesting.
Male reporter: It would be quite nice to take them for an afternoon tea.
Lord Laird: Oh.
Female Reporter: Is that a real bother to arrange or is that—?
Lord Laird: What, this afternoon?
Female Reporter: Oh no, just in general. I mean, it’s something we feel would be—
Male Reporter: He was just saying it’s okay as long as you don’t call them clients, you call them friends.
Female Reporter: Ah, right.
Lord Laird: It’s just a small point.
Female Reporter: So again, it’s the sort of—just being a bit careful, isn’t it? It’s really important, you know, to make sure the—Yeah, okay.
Male Reporter: What about receptions? I mean receptions are a form—
Kevin Cahill: Well yeah, you’ve got to be able to—
Lord Laird: You cannot run an event that is aimed at promoting a particular company, or a product. So that’s why we do the thing about—it would have to be, let’s say, a professor or something like that who can get a, well, more than one speaker, but that’s [unclear]. That’s their product endorsement. That’s not a problem.
Female Reporter: No, that’s fine.
Lord Laird: Really the only thing you can do is sell books in there. Books. That’s about the only thing you can sell.
Male Reporter: You can’t sell books?
Lord Laird: You can. [Unclear.]
Female Reporter: Oh okay. Ah, so we could—So that’s a really good way of doing it, because as you say, that’s just so—that actually just helps us to have someone there. Oh, is this yours?
Lord Laird: This is yours now.
Kevin Cahill: We were able to [unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh wow. That’s a fabulous picture.
Male Reporter: It’s a great picture, isn’t it?
Female Reporter: A rebel.
Lord Laird: Are you available tonight?
Female Reporter: We need to check with Fi don’t we, because she was going to—I think possibly. Is that—?

Male Reporter: Possibly, yeah. I have actually got [unclear].

Female Reporter: Let’s think. I just didn’t know whether Fi was going to be talking to the, er, chap we’re going to meet later. I don’t know. We need to just run that by her.

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: Really? So what—

Kevin Cahill: I was 25 years in the building before I found my way to this.

Female Reporter: So what is it?

Lord Laird: [unclear]. John Bercow will be chairing that, and that’s in his apartment, his own personal apartment.

Female Reporter: So it’s Lord Boateng?

Kevin Cahill: Robert, I can’t promise you’ll get to sit on the [unclear]

Lord Laird: It might not be able to happen.

Female Reporter: Oh that’s a shame. I did read that article. I can’t remember the chap’s wife, but she’s extraordinary.

Kevin Cahill: We have a mutual friend, a young person working in the House, and she managed to get herself photographed in the [unclear].

Female Reporter: Really?

Kevin Cahill: I don’t know how she did it.

Lord Laird: [unclear].

Female Reporter: Well, we’ll have to—let’s chat to Fi. Can we give you a ring, sort of—? Shortly after this lunch, I’ll just let you know, she’s just—Fiona runs everything. She’s like totally our boss really, isn’t she?

Lord Laird: I think it’s important that you guys get to know the feel of the place as well so you understand what I’m talking about, because it is a frenetic sort of a place. I mean it’s full of rumour, counter-rumour, sort of goes this way, that way, but this is where the decisions are taken, the big decisions are taken. Very important.

Male Reporter: That’s why it would be great to have someone like you on board, because you’re at the centre of that.

Lord Laird: Yeah. Well, I like to think so.

Male Reporter: I can’t remember. Did you [unclear]

Kevin Cahill: [unclear] to speak at these lectures.

Female Reporter: Really—[unclear] I don’t think we did, because we didn’t quite get through, but were you—

Lord Laird: [unclear] were going to say something about again?
Female Reporter: Well do you have a fee—that you have a sort of standard rate, or do you—? How do you tend to—? Do you tend to come to a separate arrangement with people or—Can I give you, say, for an average day rate that you might charge?

Lord Laird: Right, er—

Female Reporter: Just to make sure we’re not way off in the wrong ball park or anything like that.

Lord Laird: I tell you what, let us think about that and perhaps we can talk about that tonight, or can we talk about that?

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: Could we do that tonight?

Female Reporter: Yeah, absolutely, are you—?

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: Okay [laughs].

Kevin Cahill: It would be very interesting [unclear].

Female Reporter: Oh really?

Lord Laird: He usually ends up in the nightclub afterwards.

Female Reporter: Oh wow, well that does sound like fun.

Lord Laird: [Unclear.]

Kevin Cahill: You don’t have to do that when we—

Female Reporter: Sounds tempting.

Lord Laird: There’s endless bars, endless dining rooms, it’s just endless.

Female Reporter: Really?

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: So, inside?

Lord Laird: There are 1,200 rooms in Westminster, in the Palace itself, don’t forget. Twelve hundred rooms, but then all the buildings all around it, all associated with it.

Female Reporter: So it’s, er—

Lord Laird: You’ll find there’ve been a few. You’re interested in public [unclear].

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: I’d be fascinated to see it.

Female Reporter: I would be really intrigued to go, I haven’t—I’ve never—I mean I’ve got a friend who works there actually, but he’s never taken me inside, so it would be fascinating. So did you say that the—

Lord Laird: [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: No, sorry.
Kevin Cahill: Can I just say, have you worked in—

Female Reporter: Do you think that in terms of a fee, how would you put it? Because what we’ve been thinking was a retainer and then the bonus, and then we wondered—I don’t know whether you’d rather sort of lump it all in, but for something like, I don’t know, organising a tea for us in the House, is that the sort of thing—?

Lord Laird: It’s more the [unclear]. I think it’s just a case of organising, as you say, a retainer.

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: Then if it seems to be out of kilter one month, if we’re run off our feet one month, we would obviously say to you, like there’s a little bit more.

Female Reporter: Yes, okay, that seems to be best thing. Then if we were to engage you, would this include Kevin as well, or if we—

Kevin Cahill: Specialising, yes.

Lord Laird: Kevin covers for me when I’m not there. He’s got a pass, he’s got the whole bloody shebang because he is a former journalist, a sort of fixer.

Kevin Cahill: [unclear]

Female Reporter: Oh right, okay. I see, but he’s not a journalist any more, or—?

Lord Laird: Pardon?

Female Reporter: He’s not a journalist anymore?

Lord Laird: Oh no.

Female Reporter: We can trust him, I take it?

Kevin Cahill: I’ll be transferring capital, a singles fee—

Female Reporter: Excellent.

Kevin Cahill: On 19 September in [unclear].

Lord Laird: [Unclear]?

Kevin Cahill: Yeah, in [unclear].

Lord Laird: You talked about two days.

Female Reporter: Well something like that, something like that, but the one thing that—James had a chat Fiona and Michael earlier and they were sort of saying that it would be quite useful to have a kind of breakdown of what we thought different things might cost, say, if we for example, say one month we had a series of clients who we wanted to meet and we thought it would really impress them to be able to meet them in the Lords, say, I don’t know if that’s the sort of thing you can help us with, and if so, is that something—I don’t know, but would there be a fee associated with that specific arrangement, or—?

Lord Laird: The fact that they are meeting in the Lords is incidental. It’s to suit me. Meeting with so and so.
Female Reporter: Right, okay. It would be great for us, because it’s every—

Lord Laird: All fees are nonsense really, because—I believe this: the more you know, the shorter time it takes you to do things [unclear] get paid less.

Female Reporter: Yeah. I suppose that’s probably true, yeah. Well, let’s see what you think. I mean we were thinking of—I think the total package we were thinking of, including the retainer and bonuses, would probably be six figures, around sort of, say, £100,000. Is that the sort of thing—does that sound like the right sort of ballpark? I mean, I don’t want to—

Lord Laird: Yeah, probably, yeah. Let me talk it over and get back to you, okay?

Female Reporter: Okay, brilliant. We’ll just, as I say—But I mean we can be flexible obviously. As I said, we’ve got a fairly healthy budget for the public affairs side of the project in this country.

Lord Laird: You will need a wee bit of a healthy budget, but maybe—

Female Reporter: We will.

Lord Laird: There will be a fair bit of—

Female Reporter: Do you think? So what are the other costs that you think we might incur, do you think? So we have your fees and then—

Lord Laird: There will be a fair bit of socialising.

Female Reporter: Oh will there? Well that sounds like fun.

Lord Laird: [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: Oh dear. So there’d be some socialising?

Lord Laird: There’d be—the cost of food in the Palace of Westminster, it’s the same as this, possible even less, but it’s all very prestigious silver service when you’re in the Lords.

Female Reporter: Right.

Lord Laird: I find it’s easier to do, particularly with foreigners, business in the Lords, because they get carried away.

Female Reporter: Because they get?

Lord Laird: Carried away.

Female Reporter: Oh do they?

Lord Laird: They go into a state of euphoria. Particularly the Americans, they go to bloody [unclear].

Female Reporter: I bet.

Male Reporter: How many clients do you have?

Lord Laird: Just two. Azerbaijan and the Earth Foundation. I’m the chairman of the Earth Foundation.

Female Reporter: The Earth Foundation. What’s the Earth Foundation?

Lord Laird: Well it’s getting back into that sort of area, it’s—we’re trying to make sustainable communities, in this case not in this
country but particularly in places like the Philippines and Colombia. So you’re saying to, let’s say, people in Colombia, the native people of Colombia, that we’ll organise the building in of something that’s going to help you, the indigenous—there’s been a lot of bad action, like collecting money for indigenous populations without the indigenous populations ever seeing the money, or it’s only the boss sees it. So you’ve got to—so there’s not much point in us collecting money or not much point of us organising things and then the money going to the leader of the bloody indigenous group who goes and builds a house with a swimming pool in Miami, if you follow me.

Female Reporter: No.

Lord Laird: So there’s that sort of—we tend to cover a lot of stuff and follow lot of stuff [unclear]. To me, the trouble is again, back to the PR guy—

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: It’s very much a—I think a lot of these things I think are all done the wrong way round.

Female Reporter: Thanks. Coffee?

Kevin Cahill: There is some [unclear] you think your client [unclear].

Female Reporter: Right.

Kevin Cahill: The Commission is trying to do an anti-dumping duty on the Chinese.

Female Reporter: Yes, I’ve seen that. I mean we’re sort of—

Kevin Cahill: To jack the price of Chinese solar panels up by 47%.

Female Reporter: Oh will it? So we could take advantage of that. Interesting.

Kevin Cahill: Now Germany oppose it and that probably means it’s not going to happen.

Female Reporter: You have some expertise, am I right, in—I think Fiona mentioned to me, because she gave me a note that you’d been involved in an anti-dumping action.

Kevin Cahill: I was an adviser to the board of Canon, you know the camera company?

Female Reporter: Yes, are they a Chinese company?

Kevin Cahill: No, they’re Japanese.

Female Reporter: Japanese, right, sorry, of course.

Kevin Cahill: But they were faced—they hired me because they were faced with an anti-dumping action and eventually I solved the problem.

Female Reporter: Well that’s just a really great asset. Because I mean obviously in a sense it’s advantageous that—

Kevin Cahill: What you need is the Chinese to be [unclear] by the anti-dumping [unclear].
Female Reporter: Yeah.
Kevin Cahill: You need to get to a manufacturer [unclear].
Female Reporter: Although on the other side of the coin, South Korean solar is very heavily subsidised.
Kevin Cahill: They’re vulnerable too.
Female Reporter: So there is equally, it’s a balancing act, isn’t it?
Kevin Cahill: Well we worked it out.
Female Reporter: That’s fantastic, so we would let them know that. We should—I mean I don’t—it depends on—if we were to—
Male Reporter: It’s a point we were going to raise with you—well, both of you really—is that how do we hire both of you together or just—
Lord Laird: Well look, I think we’re looking to see what—I think we look to see what the commitment’s likely to be—the point is this, that between the two of us, I mean Kevin is a former researcher for Paddy Ashdown and a journalist.
Female Reporter: Right.
Lord Laird: He used to be—you were heavily involved in the Rich List.
Kevin Cahill: I was the deputy editor of the Rich List.
Lord Laird: Yeah and the [unclear].
Female Reporter: I see.
Lord Laird: I’m always deadly paranoid that if a bus ran over me, he knows everything.
Kevin Cahill: He never worries about a bus running over me.
Lord Laird: Ah the hell. Nobody [unclear]. But there is some sort of back-up.
Female Reporter: Yes, okay.
Kevin Cahill: I’m the insurance policy.
Lord Laird: I’m always conscious—for instance next week I’m away in Azerbaijan for 10 days and that type of thing comes up, there’s holidays come up, there’s all sorts of stuff.
Female Reporter: Yeah, well I just wonder whether actually—I mean it’s fantastic to have you as an adviser to Lord Laird in his capacity, but also I just wonder whether we might, if you’re interested, benefit from occasionally engaging your own services as an adviser on things like the anti-dumping. I mean it depends whether Lord Laird would be content with—
Kevin Cahill: The normal sequence of events is that Lord Laird would ask me [unclear] but South Korea has always fascinated me, since I stayed in the Shilla Hotel.
Female Reporter: Well you must come, you must come to Daedeok; it’s just a fabulous place.
Kevin Cahill: That was 25 years ago and I’ve never forgotten. The finest French restaurant in all of Asia on the top floor of the Shilla.
Female Reporter: Really? Oh wow.
Kevin Cahill: But then everybody left the Shilla in the morning to go into [unclear] to buy the counterfeit [unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh right.
Kevin Cahill: Everybody loaded up with the Louis Vuitton—
Female Reporter: Well I would be fascinated to know how it’s changed since you were there, but maybe come and have a look at Daedeok if we all go ahead with this, because it’s an extraordinary place.
Kevin Cahill: But you’ve got to know, that what your client is doing is extremely interesting.
Female Reporter: It’s really—it’s such a breakthrough and it’s the level of efficiency they’ve reached as well as transparency.
Kevin Cahill: They have been choosing a manufacturer yet?
Female Reporter: No, not yet. So that’s a really interesting area for us, because as you say, that’s a really potential vote winner, isn’t it?
Kevin Cahill: It is.
Male Reporter: That’s one of the things we want to talk to the Government about is that in eight years’ time they want to have 4 million homes with solar panelling of some sort.
Kevin Cahill: Right, a real quick one. There are 25.7 million homes in the UK, and 17.7 million are [unclear].
Male Reporter: Is that right?
Lord Laird: Yeah.
Female Reporter: Yeah, this is true—
Kevin Cahill: That’s what you expect me to know.
Female Reporter: Yeah, well that’s a great level of detail.
Male Reporter: We were hoping that maybe we might be able to get these things into social housing as well and there’s a possibility also—these are all blue sky thoughts, but we’re also trying to think of ways that we might be able to say, with the winter fuel allowance, maybe a pensioner might forgo that and instead have these windows fitted.
Female Reporter: You could say have a grant—
Lord Laird: Well what about government buildings?
Female Reporter: Government buildings would be another really interesting one.
Lord Laird: [Unclear.]
Female Reporter: I tell you, the only thing that we’re not sure about is that government buildings apparently all have a bomb-proofing layer on top of their windows. What we don’t know is how the polymer layer would interact with the bomb-proofing layer, so
that’s something we’d have to investigate. But it’s a small point.

Male Reporter: That might be true of the Whitehall but I guess but it’s probably not extensively across the country.

Female Reporter: No, that’s true, but it’s a potential snag.

Male Reporter: It did occur to us that it might be an issue. We’ve yet to go back and work out whether they can bomb-proof these windows as well—

Female Reporter: We need to talk to the South Koreans. But there’s all sorts of interesting applications, and the building regs would be great. Imagine the Cheese Grater, the Shard, buildings like that, I mean they would—the amount of electricity they would generate would be extraordinary. You know, it’s one of these things that Prince Charles has been complaining about for some time I think, because there’s obviously there’s obviously this fad for this very glass-based architecture and Prince Charles has been saying, “Well these things are just terribly energy inefficient and they’re just bleeding heat and electricity into the sky.” Actually this is the answer to that, because it’s completely reversed. It would make them the most energy efficient buildings you could possibly conceive of.

Lord Laird: Do you have any opposition at all in this country?

Female Reporter: In this country?

Male Reporter: Someone called Oxford Photovoltaics, which is a start-up company, I think coming out of—

Female Reporter: It’s out of the university, Oxford University. They just had £2 million grant funding. I mean our guys have just had an injection of £12 million and also they are working on silicone, which is again, much less cost-effective and less efficient. So we think they’re a long way behind. We’re not too worried about them.

Lord Laird: What is the name?

Female Reporter: Yeah, so basically we work with organic polymers—when I say “we”, I mean our research team are using organic polymers which are really—the benefits are they’re much cheaper.

Kevin Cahill: Can I tell you something? When I was working for Canon, there was a second—that was their key product, because it was going to cost them 300 million. But there was a second [unclear] felt that they didn’t belong in Europe.

Kevin Cahill: They showed Prince Charles an organic [unclear] and I’ve never heard a word about Canon’s organic [unclear] but they showed to Prince Charles this demonstration, you know, you use your chip in the morning and you fry it for lunch. The funny thing [unclear] Canon decided this may be—it’s intriguing what your client is thinking in the UK. Canon
birthday party—Tokyo, San Francisco, New York, Paris. I said, “Paris?” They said yes, it’s the centre of Europe and everybody can drive there. So I said, and it was so simple, I don’t know where the thought came from, “Have you told your dealers and asked them where they want to go?” They both [unclear].

Female Reporter: Oh.

Kevin Cahill: Canon spent £7.5 million on [unclear] in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. But your claim about organic polymers, Cannon had a chip and, as I say, Charles opened the show [unclear].

Female Reporter: Really? So that’s the sort—I mean obviously having Prince Charles as an advocate would be extraordinary for us, so—

Kevin Cahill: We were offered both.

Female Reporter: Really?

Kevin Cahill: And it was Canon said, “One is enough”.

Female Reporter: Wow.

Male Reporter: How do you secure Prince Charles?

Lord Laird: Pardon:

Male Reporter: How do you secure Prince Charles?

Kevin Cahill: Cost a hundred grand I think you’ll find.

Female Reporter: A hundred grand?

Kevin Cahill: Yep, 200 for the pair.

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: Tell me, what is the name you’re selling or will sell the product under?

Female Reporter: The working title in this country is Power Panes, but we might—

Male Reporter: I don’t know, it sounds quite naff.

Female Reporter: So we’re not, that’s very much a working title. Obviously because they’re a Korean company, it’s hard to—we need to get—we need to work out whether we’re going to go for something which is westernised or something which is—

Lord Laird: When you will know that name?

Female Reporter: Well I think it would be good to have a decision on that before they go public with the technology.

Male Reporter: Which is in six [unclear].

Female Reporter: But equally it may be that we go public with a sort of prototype which doesn’t have a name. Do you think that’s critical that we should get that?

Lord Laird: Have you ever thought of, say, dealing with the building excellence, excellence in building APPG, or running a series of awards every year?
Female Reporter: That would be interesting.

Lord Laird: It wouldn’t cost a heap. You would have a dinner in there, but you would probably would have to run it under the Korean name, because it would look very good if you run the damn thing yourself and if you won the excellence award. But there’s things like that. The only thing, if you do want to find out more about that building excellence APPG.

Female Reporter: Yes, that’s a really good thought.

Lord Laird: Take those guys out; you’ve got to get those guys out. I mean you’re—this is building a—

Male Reporter: One of the things we thought about was maybe actually putting together an interest group with people who would be interested. One of them may be say, I don’t know, whatever the Royal Society of Architects—

Female Reporter: Or sort of, you know, environmental groups.

Male Reporter: And environmental groups, because if you could build a group, like an industry forum, it wouldn’t be industry [unclear], then that would be quite a powerful advocate for our case.

Female Reporter: Obviously it makes it look a bit less nakedly like we’re just selling our windows, kind of thing.

Lord Laird: Well a lot of—thing about, as I was saying earlier, that annoys me about [unclear] the green lobby. We had last week or the week before—last week we had the awards for the small green companies, or sustainable companies. Many people at the dinner were other small green companies and it was like preaching in church. What is the bloody point?

Male Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: I mean I’m lecturing these guys now on—I’m trying to get them out of there and trying to join things, anything that is not necessarily green.

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Male Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: What you want to do there, I tell you that, is that you want to actually—it’s easy if you go along and talk to the architects who are currently thinking of ways of efficient energy. Let’s think of other groups. Why not get involved with what you might want to call the enemy? I just don’t know who the enemy is right now, but let’s get involved with them as well.

Male Reporter: The enemy is a competitor, I suppose.

Lord Laird: But is there any other enemy? I mean why would any architect not wish to put in something like your product or something similar?

Female Reporter: Well exactly, it’s hard to—

Male Reporter: That would be our argument.
Female Reporter: It’s a bit of a no-brainer really. I mean obviously except that the initial outlay in that it’s 20% more expensive than just—well that’s an estimate, because we’re not at mass market yet, but—than installing, you know, ordinary glass. Look, I think the construction industry feels like it’s tied up in lots of red tape already and it’s sick of all of these zero carbon homes targets and things like that. So I know that’s really the thing that we face, is that from my understanding so far, the coalition’s been trying to simplify planning law and reduce building regulation. So if we want to be introducing more regulation and saying there’s a three line whip on the sorts of windows you have to use, that might be a bit controversial. So there’s things like that that we need to take into account.

Male Reporter: There are all sorts of building regs on limiting the amount of window space you have, especially on upper floors and it would be good if we could somehow work away at those and work them down a bit. You know, the general point for us is, we want to get the Government on our side and we want them to be behind it, because we think if the UK Government gets behind us, it sort of an important signal to the rest of the world, in terms of our marketplace when we’re selling this product.

Female Reporter: We can hire—we’ve talked to a couple of public affairs companies and we’re interested in potentially talking to them about say providing a secretariat to a group, because we don’t think that’s the sort of grunt work that frankly you should be doing at your level, but what we don’t get from those people is somebody who’s got just the prestige that you have and the kind of access to people and the kind of contacts. So having somebody inside the House would be extraordinary for us, it would be really—

Lord Laird: I’d like to do a wee bit more thinking, but obviously that’s—

Kevin Cahill: Is no one else having a dessert?

Female Reporter: We’re all having coffee, so go for it, it looks good. Don’t be silly, no. Actually it looks tasty, I must say.

Lord Laird: What’s your timetable on this?

Female Reporter: Well we’re supposed to be reporting back on Wednesday, because we’ve actually been talking to a few people that we were interested in engaging as consultants, although on slightly different projects and not people that are in the House of Commons or the House of Lords, but we’re going to a report back from all of those preliminary conversations on Wednesday, so I don’t know whether you’re able to give us an indication of your interest.

Lord Laird: Oh yeah, yeah, I just want to—to be honest with you, what I want to do is look down the APPG list and all the other stuff and get a feel for it and then I’ll come back to you.

Female Reporter: Brilliant, but in principle you’re interested?

Lord Laird: Oh I mean I love this sort of stuff. This is—
Female Reporter: Fantastic.

Lord Laird: Although it’s not as challenging because you’re sort of kicking at an open door here I think, but that’s fair enough.

Female Reporter: Exactly, but I still think we really want to get this right and we really want to—it’s actually, we’re a very new company and we’ve only being going, it’s about 13 months now, so this is the—

Lord Laird: [Unclear.] 

Female Reporter: Coulton & Goldie Global. We’re very new. We were set up about 13 months ago by Jennifer Coulton and Mike Goldie and they have won this contract. It’s actually, Jang is a very established client of Mike’s because Mike’s actually a wealth manager by background, so it’s a really big opportunity for us and we really want to get this right.

Lord Laird: You want to get more work out of this?

Female Reporter: We do and we want to nail it and we think that having someone like you on board would be—and actually Kevin as well, your expertise in the anti-dumping and obviously you’ve got a very, very expert grasp of the kind of mechanisms of Parliament. So I think having both of you—

Lord Laird: And his contacts—he’s Mr Networker.

Female Reporter: Really. Well all of that’s brilliant for us and also, if you could also come back to us with a—

Kevin Cahill: We’re a kind of partnership. When was that rainy day on the Boyne?

Lord Laird: Aye, it was about 10, 12, 11 years ago.

Female Reporter: When you first met?

Lord Laird: Yeah.

Female Reporter: You two are like a kind of unbeatable duo, are you?

Kevin Cahill: He said what was I doing different and I said, “I own the field.”

Female Reporter: Oh.

Kevin Cahill: Best one-liner I ever had in my life: “It’s my field.”

Male Reporter: It sounds like you’re more friends than business partners, is that right?

Lord Laird: Yeah, absolutely. I write about him in that book.

Female Reporter: Oh yeah?

Lord Laird: I haven’t told him that, mind, but [unclear].

Female Reporter: Are we allowed to borrow this copy?

Lord Laird: Yeah, it’s your book.

Female Reporter: Oh thank you so much, that’s awfully kind.

Lord Laird: What we can do is just colour in the pages. I don’t think—
Kevin Cahill: It's got [unclear].
Female Reporter: You’ve got some pictures here. Is this you?
Lord Laird: Yes.
Female Reporter: Oh wow.
Lord Laird: I must have changed a lot.
Female Reporter: No, I can certainly see it. No, great stuff.
Lord Laird: So there you are.
Female Reporter: We’ll have to have a good old read then. No, that sounds great. Then, what else did I mean to ask you about? So we talked about—
Lord Laird: Sorry that’s just—I am the fellow called Colonel Stapleton. On 16 June every year or thereabouts, we run the re-enactment of the United Irishman battle of Saintfield and the English commander was killed on that occasion.
Male Reporter: Oh was he?
Lord Laird: But I’m a bit fed up with just doing the [unclear], because we lose every year.
Kevin Cahill: His family run both sides for that one.
Lord Laird: We lose every bloody year. Every bloody year we re-enact the battle and we lose and I’m a bit fed up with that as [unclear] Colonel Stapleton.
Female Reporter: Oh right, fascinating. So we talked about the APPGs, which is great, and we talked about questions, which is brilliant, and then for example, what about things like, are you able to advise us on or help us with things like amendments and debates and things like that?
Lord Laird: Oh yeah. Yeah.
Female Reporter: Yeah? Because the Energy Bill is going through; it’s about to go through the Lords.
Male Reporter: They’re in last stages.
Lord Laird: That is not difficult because there’s actually a department of the Lords. You take your—I take along an idea that I want to put in as an amendment, I take it along and they will polish it up to be a proper amendment.
Female Reporter: Oh really? Fantastic, so we could come to you perhaps and say, “Well this is what”—
Lord Laird: Again, back to this point, I’m not sure I would put it down but that’s [unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh okay, that’s [unclear], okay.
Male Reporter: Would you have to get someone else to put it down?
Lord Laird: I would prefer that. That’s better.
Female Reporter: Well that’s, you know—[to waiter] thank you very much, that’s kind.
To be honest, I don’t suppose it makes much difference to us who puts it down or who asks the question, it’s just—and obviously you’d be in a good position to help us with that. So that kind of thing would be good. And what about debates and things like that? Because someone mentioned the members of the House can—

Lord Laird: Well that’s under the—I mean if I spoke on your behalf, I’d have to declare an interest. You can do it, I have done it, but it would be easier to get a coterie of people, supporters, and make a point that I would ask them to do this issue or that issue or whatever.

Female Reporter: You’d be able to kind of marshal—do you think you’d be able to help us marshal a coterie of people who could do that for us?

Lord Laird: I think I can do that. But that’s totally legitimate, there’s nothing incorrect about that.

Female Reporter: Yeah, no, course. No, it’s just obviously for us it’s quite difficult because we don’t have any of those contacts or—

Male Reporter: Would we be employing you or your company?

Lord Laird: It’s just the two of us and me, I don’t really have a company.

Male Reporter: Oh I see, right.

Female Reporter: Oh we thought you had a—what is it called, Biscuit PR?

Lord Laird: No, Biscuit PR I do some work with, but they look after the Earth Foundation.

Male Reporter: Oh I see.

Female Reporter: I see, I’m sorry, I’m hogging the milk over here.

Male Reporter: So you haven’t had a company—

Lord Laird: No, I sold the company over 10 years ago—must be like 2002 I think.

Female Reporter: Okay, I mean I suppose—well the other thing is, obviously, I don’t quite know how this works but I guess we would employ you as Coulton & Goldie Global, so I guess you would declare that relationship, would you?

Lord Laird: Oh yes, I would.

Female Reporter: So then I don’t know whether you—the client, the kind of ultimate client, Himosi [?], because they would be one of a number—I mean we may in the future want to retain you if you were happy to work on other projects as well.

Lord Laird: Fine.

Female Reporter: Do you need to declare all of the clients—our clients—or could you just declare us and then—

Lord Laird: I’d just declare you.

Female Reporter: Okay, because in a way, that makes it a little bit simpler, because, you know we have all sorts of different clients, but
Kevin Cahill: In Liechtenstein, the Germans monitor every single transaction.

Female Reporter: They are really hot. The German tax people—
Kevin Cahill: Remember the story—James, you were there—about the stolen files.
Female Reporter: The stolen data files, yeah.
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear] the Germans had everything beforehand. That was a stunt to cover up what they had.
Female Reporter: Oh did they? That’s interesting.
Male Reporter: Did someone go to jail over that?
Kevin Cahill: No. [Unclear] tried blackmail [unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh really.
Kevin Cahill: But the Germans needed him as a pretext because they already had monitored every single transaction in Liechtenstein.
Female Reporter: How interesting, I didn’t know that.
Kevin Cahill: They needed somebody else.
Female Reporter: He’s got all the intel’, hasn’t he?
Lord Laird: Oh he is—
Female Reporter: How does he pick this stuff up?
Lord Laird: I don’t know.
Female Reporter: Actually Fiona mentioned, because they had a chat on the ‘phone last week, our PA, Fiona, and she was saying that Kevin was an adviser to Nick Clegg, is that right?
Lord Laird: Oh no. Right, oh yeah, he’s on the panel, yeah.
Female Reporter: Oh really?
Lord Laird: The point is, he’s a Lib Dem.
Female Reporter: But you’re not, so you’re a—
Lord Laird: No, I’m a Crossbencher.
Female Reporter: Right. What does he—I was just saying that Fiona mentioned you were an adviser to Nick Clegg.
Kevin Cahill: Yeah, theoretically.
Female Reporter: What capacity?
Kevin Cahill: Well I was supposed to be on the council of advisers, only it never met.
Lord Laird: You’re just getting to the stage where you won’t admit to it.
Kevin Cahill: Yeah, I meet Nick four times a year but the coalition doesn’t have an interest in what I’m interested in.

Female Reporter: Oh really?
Kevin Cahill: I chat about the family, but if there was something to talk about, then [unclear].

Female Reporter: Really?
Kevin Cahill: Yeah.

Female Reporter: So do you think if we were to engage you as well, that might be something—

Kevin Cahill: If all the parameters have been satisfied about declarations and—

Female Reporter: Of course.
Kevin Cahill: I have to make my declaration.

Female Reporter: Do you? Okay, it’s all very transparent obviously.
Kevin Cahill: It’s the same, you know, I’m under the same rules.

Female Reporter: Right.
Kevin Cahill: It’s a fantastic set-up, I mean super computers are key to the future. Which countries survive and which countries fail will depend on super computers. So it’s a key [unclear] because it seems very interesting. [Unclear] Mr Smith, John Smith—

Female Reporter: Oh wow.
Kevin Cahill: We’re all from Cheltenham, from GCHQ.

Female Reporter: Oh right. God, you’d think they’d be a bit more sophisticated about their [unclear].
Kevin Cahill: This is the whole—Parliament is really special, it’s very special and I’ve been there for 26 years.

Female Reporter: Gosh, really?
Kevin Cahill: Protecting the Parliament is very important.

Female Reporter: Yes.
Kevin Cahill: I mean there are 60 of those invitations to the Speaker’s sitting room, that’s it.

Female Reporter: Really? Just 60? See we didn’t know how privileged we were.

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear] I need to get you cleared because of security issues.

Female Reporter: Right, of course.
Kevin Cahill: Everybody’s got to be put through their—

Female Reporter: Right, of course.
Kevin Cahill: So let me know.

Female Reporter: Yeah, we will, we just to check with [unclear], it does sound like a good one, doesn’t it?
Kevin Cahill: Sorry, James, for giving—
Male Reporter: No, that’s fine.

Kevin Cahill: Wife and three daughters, I prefer women to men.

Female Reporter: Oh do you? Very sensible, Kevin.

Kevin Cahill: Nothing personal.

Female Reporter: Very sensible.

Kevin Cahill: All boys’ army, all boys’ school, all boys’ monastery, all boys’ bloody army.

Female Reporter: You were in a monastery?

Kevin Cahill: Yeah. I [unclear].

Female Reporter: Oh my goodness. Wow.

Kevin Cahill: Clergy were the Vatican intelligence service.

Female Reporter: Right.

Kevin Cahill: I didn’t come out but that’s—there’s amazing things that can be done, especially if [unclear] a fair idea what your project is about and it is extremely important tactically.

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Kevin Cahill: Strategically we’re going to be stuck with oil and gas as the main, so anything that can lower the dependency, as Lord Laird said, is incredibly important. I mean, what he didn’t tell you is that the Foreign Office talk about standing at the sidelines and shouting, “Please, please be nice to these buggers”, you know. Our Government’s policy is to be nice to the Azerbaijanis until can get off the dependence.

Female Reporter: Really?

Kevin Cahill: It’s really simple. These are the strategic issues.

Female Reporter: Well hopefully, we feel like for all those reasons it’s a really interesting proposition and because, I mean if we could get—we’ve estimated that with a house with an average number of windows and average amount of glass—

Kevin Cahill: 17.7 million, plus the social housing.

Female Reporter: Yeah, it’s a huge market and with—the other interesting issue at play is obviously all the different incentives that are available, so you’ve got the green deal, you’ve got feed-in tariffs, you’ve got renewable heat incentive. Obviously those subsidies aren’t going to last forever, but that’s another—

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear] thinking about the years I’ve—I guess if your case is good, a good parliamentarian can get it heard by Government. That’s the key.

Female Reporter: Yeah, well that’s exactly what we want.

Kevin Cahill: It sounds like—I have a feeling I know what you’re talking about.

Female Reporter: Brilliant, no, that’s wonderful. So before we wrap up, are there any other things that we ought to take back to Jen [?]
and Mike and sort of run by them in terms of the things that you could offer to us if we were to engage you?

Lord Laird: There’s other things around, not just Lords-based, but we can do things in the City, we can do things all over the place.

Male Reporter: That would be useful.

Female Reporter: That would be great.

Lord Laird: And the other point is that, and I put this crudely, don’t take it the wrong way, but I put it crudely, when you’ve got a title, you tend to get into places that you wouldn’t get into if you hadn’t got a title.

Male Reporter: Oh I see.

Female Reporter: I can imagine.

Lord Laird: I’m not proud of that, it’s a fact of life, particularly with foreigners, and again particularly with anybody who comes from a republic, like the Americans.

Male Reporter: Sorry, what was that you said?

Lord Laird: Viva the republic.

Female Reporter: You were saying that the American clients and people go to a state of euphoria when they visit the House of Lords.

Lord Laird: Yes, yes.

Female Reporter: That’s really useful for us.

Lord Laird: Absolutely. I mean, you show them round and you show them the throne, not a throne—you show them the British throne, you take them into both chambers, you let walk on the floor of chambers if you can, you take them around the place, you show them the Royal Gallery, you show them where the Queen puts on her crown, you talk about all the history, it’s all there. It’s all there. If you come tonight—

Female Reporter: Hopefully we can.

Lord Laird: He’ll ask you which British Prime Minister was assassinated, when where and why.

Female Reporter: Oh my goodness, I didn’t know it was going to be history quiz. I’m going to fail horribly.

Kevin Cahill: [Unclear.]

Lord Laird: [Unclear.]

Female Reporter: Right.

Lord Laird: It is, you know, I’ve had guests in there who watched, for instance, stupid things like the Speaker coming in the morning—I’d just taken them over to the Commons—and they’re in tears.

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: Yeah.
Female Reporter: They’re so moved. And that puts them in the right frame of mind to do business, I imagine.

Lord Laird: Well it does actually because it sort of softens them up I think.

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: I mean I don’t make any money out of this, but I run a function every year on Burns Night with Raytheon, the defence people, and they’ve got a whole lot of—they bring bloody planeloads of Americans over, you know?

Kevin Cahill: Tells you everything, doesn’t it?

Lord Laird: Tells you everything. They love bringing the Americans into the Palace of Westminster. See that’s the site of Parliament here for nearly 800 years. What you seeing is part of a building that has been in daily use for nearly 1,000 years. You show them where Charles I was condemned to death, where William Wallace was condemned to death. You want to see Magna Carta, I’ll show you Magna Carta.

Female Reporter: Brilliant, it’s just fantastic.

Lord Laird: They want to see Charles I’s death warrant, the death warrant signed by Oliver Cromwell.

Female Reporter: Really, is that all there?

Lord Laird: Oliver Cromwell’s signature’s there.

Female Reporter: Goodness me.

Lord Laird: It’s all there.

Female Reporter: Wow, I had no idea all that was in there. That’s just wonderful, how exciting.

Male Reporter: How does it work in the Lords? Is your time taken up a lot with committees and—

Lord Laird: It could be, a lot of people—a lot of them are committee men, I’m not really a committee person, although funnily enough I’m going to one at 4 pm today, but that’s—I’m not really [unclear]. Everybody’s got a speciality. My speciality is putting down questions.

Female Reporter: Right.

Lord Laird: I put down more questions than anybody else, I think, each year for the last 11 or 12 years.

Male Reporter: Really?

Female Reporter: Do you have special interests in—

Lord Laird: Yes, I do. I get stuck in all sorts of things. I mean, I took an interest in South Wales Police. I’ve never been to South Wales and they actually had a debate on it. I said [unclear] “I think there’s corruption down there.”
Female Reporter: Oh, really? Can you have a debate on something? If you’re interested, can you get them to hold a debate on a particular issue?

Lord Laird: Oh yes.

Female Reporter: Really? So is that the sort of thing—

Lord Laird: The thing about the Lords [unclear] is that if you put your name down to speak, you’re guaranteed to speak.

Female Reporter: Oh, really?

Lord Laird: You do not have a bill team, so therefore—by the way, that’s a short time to speak, two minutes, but you’ll get to speak, unlike in the Commons where you get the cut-out.

Female Reporter: Oh, that’s great.

Lord Laird: We have—

Female Reporter: If we wanted someone to speak on behalf of, say, an adaptation of the building regulations to incorporate solar glass, as an example, is that the sort of thing—would we be able to write something that we could pass to somebody and they might be able to say it?

Lord Laird: Well, what you can do—look, let’s be—we can send a—

Kevin Cahill: Just a minute now, sorry, age and diabetes—

Lord Laird: Look, we can run debates, we can take part in debates—this is the sort of thing we can do. Let’s say you’re trying to change the building regulations, we can take part in debates, put down amendments in debates; holding debates, putting down questions, or writing to the minister.

Female Reporter: Writing to the minister? Is that really something you can do as well?

Lord Laird: Yes and you must get a reply, which is government policy, and you must get it in a reasonable time.

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: And what it says is government policy.

Female Reporter: When you do that, do you have to declare your interest then as well?

Lord Laird: Ah, well, that’s the soft underbelly. What you do is you say, “Dear”—whatever it is, Fred or whatever minister—”I want to discuss such and such. I do have an interest in this topic”, that’s all you have to say.

Female Reporter: That could just be an interest.

Lord Laird: That’s it. You can ask a whole big series—that’s one of the things that you do, is ask a whole series of questions by letter.

Female Reporter: They have to reply to you?

Lord Laird: Pardon?
Female Reporter: Do they have to reply to you?
Lord Laird: Oh yeah. Oh, they must reply.
Female Reporter: Is that—
Lord Laird: Absolutely. They would be in breach of Parliament if they didn’t.
Female Reporter: Really?
Lord Laird: Yes, they must reply to me, and what they write is Government policy.
Female Reporter: Wow.
Male Reporter: It’s a great way of finding out information, isn’t it?
Lord Laird: Yeah.
Female Reporter: Because obviously if I was to write in, they could just ignore me, couldn’t they?
Lord Laird: I’m a combative soul as well. I won a case against the BBC there last year. I’ve got another case against the BBC to do with Leveson. The one—do you know an MP called Diane Abbott?
Female Reporter: Yeah, I’ve heard of her.
Male Reporter: Yeah, vaguely.
Female Reporter: Seen her on the telly, I think.
Lord Laird: Yes, she is on some—she and Michael Portillo do some bloody programme about—
Female Reporter: Yes, I’ve seen that, that’s the thing I’ve seen.
Lord Laird: Yeah, but anyway, they made her the shadow minister for something, and then they discovered she was still being paid as a commentator but she should only be paid as a party spokesman. Party spokesmen have to be—a commentator is someone who tells you what they think; a party spokesman puts the party line.
Female Reporter: Yes.
Lord Laird: I wrote quite a number of letters, so eventually I took them to a tribunal and I actually won the bloody thing.
Female Reporter: Did you? I didn’t know that.
Lord Laird: They took the money off her, yeah. The other one about Leveson, about the Jimmy Savile inquiry and about the fact that—and this is too stupid because they get their own back at me, they’re always trying to get me for something, but actually they did. I do have to put my hand up and say last March I did a television interview and I managed to say something with a slight—not a sexual double meaning but just a double meaning, but that’s—
Female Reporter: Oh, honestly, I mean, people need a sense of humour about these things, don’t they? It’s just silly.
Lord Laird: It wasn’t funny, it wasn’t funny, but it’s just the way it goes, just the way it goes. I mean, it will only take a—

Female Reporter: No, that’s great, so there’s all sorts of different things.

Lord Laird: I’m a bit of a troublemaker actually.

Female Reporter: That’s what we like to hear!

Lord Laird: Yeah, and do you remember the American thing, while you were doing foreign policy—

Kevin Cahill: Yes.

Lord Laird: It was covered by the new foreign policy agreement.

Female Reporter: Oh yeah?

Kevin Cahill: Yeah, it took four years of questions. Lord Laird was the first person to find out. The Treasury had put up all sorts of [unclear]. We paid the World War II debt off and forgot to mention the World War I debt, which is over—

Lord Laird: We still owe something like £3,300 billion on the First World War.

Female Reporter: No, really?

Lord Laird: That’s a live debt, so I was trying to work out why it was—

Kevin Cahill: The propaganda was designed—

Lord Laird: This is the start of the Gulf War, the first Gulf War, and I was trying to work out why it was that we had no foreign policy, we just had to follow the Americans: “Yes, sir, what do you...?”

Female Reporter: Do you know, I had no idea was had—we were in that much debt.

Lord Laird: After a lot of [unclear] and the point is, you know the civil servants are under pressure, they’re [unclear] and takes a long time. It took years to get the bloody answer out of them.

Female Reporter: I don’t think I read about that. You’d think that would be a really big story.

Kevin Cahill: The government press machine suppressed it.

Lord Laird: Well, there was a wee bit of—

Female Reporter: How do they do that?

Lord Laird: We owe, I don’t know, more money than the bloody country is worth. We owe vast sums of money for the First World War. It’s only in the last number of years we’ve paid off the second war—it’s only about five years ago we paid off the last payment on the second war and we’ve still the first war to pay for.

Female Reporter: That’s why you think we are sort of in their pocket?

Lord Laird: That’s why we’ve got a special relationship.

Female Reporter: Right.
Lord Laird: Special relationship.
Kevin Cahill: Because they called in the debt for it first.
Lord Laird: The thing that you'll find—the thing in the Palace of Westminster is nothing is ever what it seems.
Female Reporter: Right.
Lord Laird: The classic example, the best example—and don't take this personally, I'm totally opposed to foxhunting, okay, nothing to do with your family—
Female Reporter: Right, nothing to do with my surname.
Lord Laird: Oh [unclear].
Female Reporter: [Laughs.]
Lord Laird: I'm sure they're a lovely family. I'm sure they—
Female Reporter: We wouldn't want to be hunted.
Lord Laird: I'm totally opposed to foxhunting.
Female Reporter: Right.
Lord Laird: I got fairly well in with the anti-foxhunting lobby. Nothing is ever what it seems. Do you remember the riot outside the Palace of Westminster caused by the hunters?
Female Reporter: Oh, yeah, I do, vaguely. Was that the one that was—no, hang on, there was one where some people got in, wasn't there?
Lord Laird: Yeah, that was that day.
Female Reporter: Was that that one?
Lord Laird: Yeah. I don't—I think that was orchestrated by the other side.
Female Reporter: Do you?
Lord Laird: Who lost? Who lost the vote and who [unclear] a very bad image? It was the hunting lobby, okay? The hunting lobby, in my opinion, was actually the anti-hunting lobby in disguise.
Female Reporter: Running sort of smear tactics?
Lord Laird: Seriously, they've got—I discovered in that particular case that a lot of these people had actually infiltrated the other organisation. Nothing is ever what it seems.
Female Reporter: Right.
Lord Laird: So those lots had infiltrated each other and the people who were creating the fuss were actually looking for hunters by name, [unclear] hunters by conviction, and they had the effect—
Female Reporter: Oh, how interesting.
Lord Laird: —that they got the legislation through.
Female Reporter: So it's all sort of smoke and mirrors.
Lord Laird: Nothing ever—nothing is what it seems.
Female Reporter: So what you need is somebody who understands that.
Male Reporter: You’re pro-hunting yourself?
Lord Laird: Well, anti-hunting totally, that’s why [unclear] to get something done.
Female Reporter: Yes.
Lord Laird: I’ve nothing against—I love foxes.
Female Reporter: Do you?
Lord Laird: Well, why not?
Female Reporter: They’re quite sweet.
Lord Laird: [Unclear] we’re supposed to be a species—
Kevin Cahill: His [unclear] has a pet fox in her garden in Dulwich.
Female Reporter: A pet fox? Oh, really? In Dulwich?
Lord Laird: We’re supposed to be a species who can think, not just [unclear]. The idea of people dressing up in fancy dress and going around chasing a small, frightened animal across a field, I think it’s—
Female Reporter: It is a little bit silly, isn’t it?
Male Reporter: Ludicrous.
Lord Laird: I mean, I don’t mind culling. I’ll go out and cull with the best of them, a quick shot round. But it’s not a sport. I’m against golf for the same reason.
Female Reporter: Golf?
Lord Laird: Well, anywhere where you can lose your balls, in my opinion, is a blood sport.
Female Reporter: [Laughs.]
Lord Laird: You fell into that one, didn’t you!
Female Reporter: I did walk straight into that one, didn’t I?
Lord Laird: [unclear] I want to do, if you come tonight from about—I’ll take you down to the back of the bicycle shed.
Female Reporter: To the—where’s that?
Lord Laird: To the back of the bicycle shed.
Female Reporter: Will you now?
Kevin Cahill: Surely a good Alleyn’s girl knows where the bicycle shed is.
Female Reporter: [Laughs.]
Lord Laird: Well, I’ll show you something you’ve never seen before.
Female Reporter: Right, what would that be?
Lord Laird: [Unclear] one of your relations left a lot of explosives.
Female Reporter: Oh.
Lord Laird: He left them in the back of the bicycle shed.
Female Reporter: Is that so?
Lord Laird: I don’t think he came in on a bicycle, actually. It’s amazing when you say to females, “I’ll take you around the back of the bicycle shed”—

Female Reporter: It’s all sorts of horrible memories of secondary school.

Kevin Cahill: It conjures memories of school, all right.

Female Reporter: It does, yeah.

Lord Laird: You say to them, “I’ll show you something you’ve never seen before.”

Female Reporter: Yeah, that—

Lord Laird: They never say no.

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: Never say—

Female Reporter: I suppose it depends who you say it to, but yeah, or whether your curiosity is piqued.

Lord Laird: No, but, I mean, we can help you on any—I’m also dyslexic, so I do a lot of lecturing. I haven’t done it actually for a year or two now. I lecture on dyslexics, on dyslexia. I was so dyslexic, I thought I was anorexic.

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: That’s an in-joke.

Female Reporter: Brilliant. Well, it just sounds like there’s so much you guys can offer and what a great team as well. I mean, the pair of you are just—

Kevin Cahill: We’ve done a few things in our time.

Female Reporter: It sounds like it.

Kevin Cahill: We haven’t overthrown the southern Irish government but we’re working on it.

Lord Laird: We’re working on it.

Female Reporter: You’re working on it, yeah.

Lord Laird: We’re working on that.

Female Reporter: Brilliant.

Lord Laird: Well, look, do you want to ‘phone back then and let us know when you’re coming tonight?

Female Reporter: Yeah, we will check with Fi and—

Kevin Cahill: Can I slightly—let’s get a photocopy of that, because I have to produce it.

Lord Laird: Haven’t I got that?

Kevin Cahill: You mean I’ve got more?

Lord Laird: You might have given it to me. Have I not got two tickets?

Female Reporter: We can—
Kevin Cahill: Rather, 'phone me and say if you’re coming because there could be something there.

Lord Laird: Yeah, she’s coming to my place.

Kevin Cahill: I have got to clear you.

Female Reporter: Well, it’s like—do you want to—yeah, I will do. We can keep that, but—

Kevin Cahill: A quarter to seven.

Female Reporter: Quarter to seven, fantastic. We’ll give Fi a ring after this lunch and just check with her, because she’s in charge of our diaries.

Lord Laird: Well, if we’re doing this, we’d like both of you to come again for dinner.

Female Reporter: We’d love to come for dinner. That would be so exciting to see it.

Kevin Cahill: It’s quite good.

Female Reporter: It would be wonderful. I mean, I think—actually, I mean, I don’t know whether this would be possible, but depending on where we are with this, Jang, the head investor, is coming over at the start of June and I think he would just be overwhelmed to be hosted in the Lords.

Lord Laird: Okay, I’m back on 5 June from Azerbaijan. Take us for dinner [unclear] whatever you want to do. Obviously, in any of the—

Female Reporter: Brilliant, that’s so kind.

Lord Laird: In any of the expenses things, you guys will take the bill for that?

Female Reporter: Of course.

Kevin Cahill: Unlike this one.

Female Reporter: Yeah, no, like I said, we’ve got quite a good budget. So, I mean, is there anything that you think that we ought to be doing to be building relationships with MPs, any kind of hospitality that would be appropriate?

Lord Laird: Look, you need to build relationships. It’s not just me, it’s you.

Female Reporter: Yeah.

Lord Laird: You start off with the MPs a couple of steps ahead of everybody else because you’re an attractive female.

Female Reporter: Oh [laughs].

Lord Laird: But the trouble is in the Lords, they tend to be homosexuals.

Female Reporter: Do they? Well, we can throw him to the wolves, that’s fine.

Lord Laird: So that’s James’s department. That’s James’s department. People think that’s behind us now, but it’s not really.

Female Reporter: No, no.
Kevin Cahill: Tell Robyn your story. Be quick.

Lord Laird: I was—I’m 14 years a Lord. I’m there three weeks or so and I’m sitting beside this elderly hereditary peer and they all speak—they all talk like 1950s cars. It takes a while to start them [makes car noises] and they all speak at the top of their voice. “I tell you confidentially, I will tell you”—with the whole bloody place listening.

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: I was sitting beside this guy, we were having a debate about domestic theft and there’s nobody in the bloody House except us and a few others. The next night we’re having a debate, it was about the date—it was about the age of consent for homosexuals and the place is full, absolutely bloody standing room only. Homosexuals and foxes are the only things that fill the bloody place.

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: So I said to this elderly guy, “Why is it that yesterday we talked about domestic theft, nobody here, this day we’re talking about homosexuals and the place is full?” He said, “There’s a damn sight more buggers here than there are burglars.”

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: We had a woman in the last Government who was a bit pompous—they’re all, most of them are pompous—and she spoke on behalf of the Government on health administration.

Male Reporter: In the Lords?

Lord Laird: Yeah, we say we got—every position’s covered by a spokesman in the Government—and what she said about health administration was totally correct in my opinion. But she did tell their Lordships’ House that the trouble with incontinence was that it fell between two stools.

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: Now where do you go from there?

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: She could not understand what we were laughing at. I think the penny twiggped, so I think there’s probably a male civil servant there who went home that night with less anatomy than they had come to work with.

Female Reporter: [Laughs.]

Lord Laird: But listen, thanks for the lunch.

Female Reporter: Oh, thank you so much, chaps, it was wonderful to meet—

Lord Laird: If we all work together, it would be good fun.

Female Reporter: Yeah, I think it will. Well, we’ll have to—

Kevin Cahill: I signed that for [unclear].
Female Reporter: Oh, thank you, here we are, that’s awfully kind.
Kevin Cahill: James will get you one later, I only brought one.
Female Reporter: Oh, that’s awfully kind. Well, we can keep it in the office.
Kevin Cahill: [unclear] Read through it.
Female Reporter: Oh, thank you. No, I think it will be good fun working together.
Kevin Cahill: The centre of the universe is Artigarvan.
Female Reporter: Yep, okay. Well, let us give you a call and let you know about tonight. I really hope we can. I will let you know ASAP.
Kevin Cahill: I’ll tell you where to be at a quarter to 7.
Female Reporter: Fantastic.
Kevin Cahill: I have to pick you up.
Female Reporter: Oh okay, oh thank you so much. Thank you.
Lord Laird: [Unclear.]
Female Reporter: No, in the best possible way [laughs].
Lord Laird: [Unclear.]
Female Reporter: Okay, yeah, we must do that, that would be really good fun. Thank you so much, it was lovely to meet you. I hope we can work together, and let us know about your fee and we’ll come to an agreement.
Lord Laird: Okay, we’ll get that in. You’ll certainly get it before Wednesday and then we can find when you can come along. Lovely to meet you.
Female Reporter: Wonderful to meet you, Kevin, really enjoyed it.
Lord Laird: We’ll have some fun.
Female Reporter: Yeah, it would be great working with you and make sure he gets the details of his fee, won’t you? Keep an eye on him!
Kevin Cahill: [Unclear.]
Female Reporter: Yeah, I hope we can come tonight and yeah, hopefully we can work with you too, that would be great. Right-o, where have we got to be next? We’ve got a half-three, is the next thing?
Male Reporter: Yeah, it is.
[ENDS]

Appendix F: Emails between Lord Laird (and Kevin Cahill) and undercover Sunday Times reporters, 14 May–1 June 2013

Email from James Lloyd to Lord Laird, 14 May 2013 at 3.21 pm
I hope this finds you well. I’m getting in touch because my company, Coulton & Goldie Global, a Zurich-based strategic consultancy, is setting up a UK operation
and we are looking to recruit a select group of expert consultants to support our work. One of our most exciting new projects involves building a European launch strategy for a leading-edge solar technology developer in the far east, and we feel that your personal business and political acumen could be a great asset to us in bringing this venture to fruition.

The client is developing a range of solar PV nano-cell technologies which represent a bold leap forward and we believe could be a crucial breakthrough in the British government’s progress towards meeting its renewable energy and zero carbon homes targets. The consultancy work would take up around a day or possibly two each month with an extremely generous remuneration package including a quarterly bonus.

If this is an opportunity which may interest you, my colleague Robyn Fox and I would welcome the chance to tell about it. We will be in the UK over the next couple of weeks.

Email from Kevin Cahill to James Lloyd, 15 May 2013 at 5.30 pm
Lord Laird asked me to contact you re Monday. I am his special advisor.
[Mr Cahill detailed his telephone numbers.]

Email from James Lloyd to Kevin Cahill, 16 May 2013 at 10.43 am
So sorry to have missed your calls yesterday. Have been bogged down with some client business. I’ll get my assistant to call you today. Thanks.

Email from Kevin Cahill to James Lloyd, 16 May 2013 at 10.53 am
Thanks James. I’m out of reach until 1230 so if assistant could use mobile later that would be great.

Email from Fiona Bonnington to Lord Laird, 16 May 2013 at 7.48 pm
James has asked me to get in touch to confirm your lunch with him and Robyn at 1pm on Monday 20th. I have booked you all into the Ivy—I hope that suits. I would be really grateful if you could let me know if you’ll be happy to sign a very standard NDA so James knows how much information he’ll be able to divulge about the South Korean technology at this initial meeting.

He has also asked me to mention to you that we have had a call and email from Mr Kevin Cahill who we understand is your special advisor asking if he can also come along to the lunch. James wanted me to run this by you before giving an answer.

Finally, James asked me to say how very much he and Robyn are looking forward to meeting you on Monday.

Email from Lord Laird to Fiona Bonnington, 17 May 2013 at 2.57 pm
I would be delighted to join James and Robyn for lunch on Monday next as arranged. I propose to bring Kevin with me.
Email from Fiona Bonnington to Lord Laird and Kevin Cahill, 20 May 2013 at 11.44 am

James and Robyn are really looking forward to seeing you both at The Ivy at 1pm and I have extended the booking to include Mr Cahill. James insists that Mr Cahill will be his guest and will not hear of him paying for his own lunch!

Email from Robyn Fox to Lord Laird, 20 May 2013 at 6.09 pm

It was a very great pleasure to meet you today over lunch and we were delighted that you were so enthusiastic about the work. I have briefed Jennifer and Mike (copied) on our fascinating conversation and they are as excited as we are about what you can offer Haemosu. We look forward to hearing from you tonight or tomorrow with details of your fee and really hope we can get started soon!

Apologies that James and I couldn’t make the event tonight—Fiona (our PA) has arranged a client meeting which we couldn’t shift—but I spoke to Kevin and he has very kindly offered to try to get us a place at the next one.

Hope to speak soon!

Email from Robyn Fox to Lord Laird, 21 May 2013 at 7.34 pm

I’m really sorry to have to tell you that we are no longer in a position to offer you the work we discussed for Haemosu. While we were very taken with your credentials we have met today with an outstanding candidate who we feel perfectly fits what we are looking for on this project, with a very strong technical understanding of the solar energy field, and we have agreed to engage her services without delay. I’m sorry we can’t work together but we really enjoyed meeting you and Kevin and wish you all the best.

Email from Kevin Cahill to Robyn Fox and Lloyd James, 24 May 2013 at 7.20 am

Haemosu; a shape changing spirit from Korean mythology. How very quaint

In the meantime have you consulted your lawyers about the criminal offence of fraudulently misrepresenting yourselves as a Swiss company which is not registered, does not exist, but is proffering financial contracts in London? I would. The Zurich police are very keen to talk to you.

Oh, and perhaps you’d also better consult your lawyers about the criminal offence of attempting to fraudulently bribe members of Parliament.

Email from Kevin Cahill to Robyn Fox, 24 May 2013 at 7.48 am

When attempting a sting the most essential prerequisite of all is to make sure that what you are doing is not criminal, in practice or intent, or that whatever public interest you think you are pursuing justifies any law breaking. The next prerequisite is to ensure that your cover works. Starting with your cover, it didn’t. On Friday afternoon last we knew that there was no such company as Coulton Goldie in Zurich. Your PA was given enough information by me to back off at the point. You didn’t. By Monday morning we knew that your phone was false, the website was a very poor, cheap, and false too. We decided to go along to obtain formal evidence of what you were up to—and to have a free lunch at the Ivy, which you were photographed entering and leaving. The lunch was a real laugh.

Do tell James that if he is going to pretend to be hard of hearing he should get a
hearing aid like me. As it was he looked totally ridiculous trying to make sure the
mike in his recorder was clear. He should have been prepared for questions, given
how many you had asked and were asking. He wasn’t and ‘curmudgeon’ is not a
good cover. Oh, and if you are going to say you studied English at Leeds, do make
sure you at least know the name of its most famous Prof. He didn’t.

Going back to the first point, the law. When I confirmed with the Swiss authorities
on Friday that your company did not exist, they got extremely curious about what
you were doing. I said you were offering a large financial contract in London.
They said that was serious fraud and wanted to know all the details. They are very
sensitive about misrepresentation of Swiss companies in the present climate. I have
passed along your details, as requested. You might have gotten away with the
attempted bribery rap here in the UK, but even that may now result in charges.
Your editors should know that the Parliamentary authorities have issued a warning
about your activities and have your details.

And as for Haemousu, I’m delighted you have a sense of humour.

Email from Heidi Blake, Deputy Insight Editor, The Sunday Times, to Lord Laird, 31
May 2013 at 9.16 pm

The Sunday Times is preparing an article for publication this weekend which will
contain details of a meeting you had with two representatives of a company called
Coulton & Goldie Global over lunch 20 May 2013. The company was offering to
hire you to help lobby for new building regulations—and other policy changes—
which would benefit a solar energy client in South Korea. The two representatives
asked you to provide parliamentary advice and services, act as a paid advocate for
the South Korean client in parliament and in your dealings with the government,
and to host functions on behalf of the client in the House of Lords. The provision
of such advice and services would be a breach of the House of Lords code of
conduct and the rules on refreshment department functions.

You told the executives that you would be happy to perform these services for a fee
of £120,000 a year for two days’ work a month. You said that you would declare
your financial relationship with Coulton & Goldie Global in your register of
interests, but that you would not disclose your link with the company’s ultimate
client. You told the executives that you would be willing to ask questions, make
speeches, instigate debates and table amendments in parliament to lobby for
policies which would benefit their client. However, if you did this, you would have
to declare that you had a financial interest in the relevant area. Therefore, you said
it would be better to persuade a “coterie” of other peers to advocate for the client
in parliament. You said you had friends in the House of Lords who ask questions
on behalf of your existing clients, and that you ask questions on behalf of theirs.
This way, the link between the financial interest and the parliamentary advocacy is
obscured. The same applied to making speeches and tabling amendments.

You said that if the company’s client wanted to propose changes to the Energy
Bill, you would take them to the House of Lords drafting department, who would
help shape the suggestions into legally viable amendments. You told the executives
that you would write to Government ministers on behalf of their client.

You offered to host marketing and lobbying functions in parliament on behalf of
Coulton & Goldie’s client. The commercial nature of these functions would be
obscured by saying that they were personal events hosted for your friends. You
said that the House of Lords was an excellent place to host clients because the
impressive surroundings make them more amenable to doing business.
You could help the company set up an all-party parliamentary group on solar energy by recruiting the MPs and peers required to register it. The group could be used as a vehicle for lobbying the government.

You said you would declare the consultancy work in your register of interests and when speaking in the House or writing to ministers in relevant topics. This notwithstanding, the services you were offering would have breached the House of Lords code of conduct, which bans peers from acting as paid advocates, attempting to influence parliament or offering any parliamentary advice or services for money. You would also be in breach of the rules on refreshment department functions, which ban peers for hosting events for their own, or anyone else’s, direct or indirect financial benefit.

You also said that the majority of your fellow peers were homosexuals and that the only two issues which filled the chamber were gay rights and fox-hunting. You also mocked an elderly hereditary peer, comparing him to a 1950s car.

The House of Lords banqueting log shows that you have hosted 4 “personal” events with no named participants in the past two years, as follows: committee room refreshments for 70 on 18/04/2012; committee room refreshments for 80 on 24/04/2012; committee room refreshments for 70 on 01/03/2012; and an evening reception for 100 in Cholmondeley Room and Terrace on 23/03/2011. Who paid for these events? Were they in fact corporate events hosted by you on behalf of paying clients?

The Sunday Times will report your offer to act as a paid advocate and parliamentary advisor, to host functions in the House of Lords in return for payment, and your willingness to breach the code of conduct, as matters of legitimate public interest and concern. Please respond with any comments you wish to make by 4pm tomorrow (Saturday) at the latest so that we can reflect them fully in our article.

Email from Lord Laird to Heidi Blake, Deputy Insight Editor, The Sunday Times, on 1 June 2013 at 3.52 pm

In recent days I have been the subject of a scam operated by journalists masquerading as communications consultants.

This has led to allegations that I have broken the rules of the House of Lords.

I wish to make it clear that I did not agree to act as a paid advocate in any proceedings of the House nor did I accept payment or other incentive or reward in return for providing parliamentary advice or services.

I have not broken any rules. However, I have referred myself to the appropriate authorities and I will be making no further statement until I have received their ruling.

Appendix G: Transcript of telephone call between undercover BBC reporter and Lord Laird, 7 March 2013, approximately 12.40 pm

LL: Hello.
DF: Oh, hello, yes, is that Lord Laird?
LL: Yes
DF: Hello, it’s Daniel Mann here from …

LL: Ah yes, you left me a message …

DF: I’m so sorry I missed your call, I’m so sorry, I’ve been in meetings all morning.

LL: No, no, no worries. How can I help you?

DF: Yes, well I’ll tell you what it’s all about. We’re a strategic communications company I know you’re in the same line of business yourself, or similar, but basically one of our clients is an outfit called the Society of Friends of Fiji.

LL: Right.

DF: They’ve been set up, not that long ago actually, and basically they are funded by a conglomeration of business and industry interests over in Fiji and the reason … their basic remit, there’s a website actually, they’ve got a website, but their basic remit is to try and redress Fiji’s public image which, I don’t know if you’re across what’s happened in Fiji in recent times but.. err it’s been …

LL: Only roughly, I beg your pardon … [inaudible]

DF: It’s been suspended from the Commonwealth for a while now because of the fact that there haven’t been any democratic elections there for a few years but there are going to be elections there next year. And it’s also been suspended from the Pacific Forum which is the group of islands in the south-east Asia area and the Pacific and basically it’s had a major impact on its industry, particularly the sugar industry and tourism. And although there is the expectation and hope that when they have the elections next year that’ll they’ll be … get fully reinstated they are just trying to pave the way for that because there are concerns that if it doesn’t happen there could be major ramifications for them financially. And what we were asked to do was to see if we could come up with some consultants, particularly people with parliamentary experience, who have international experience and standing and whatever and see if they might be able to act as consultants or even sit on an advisory panel which they may be setting up and so your name was one that was suggested, so I thought I would ask?

LL: Well that’s very kind of somebody. Well, obviously you would accept that I would have to look into it a little bit more.

DF: Of course.

LL: In principle there’s no problem but I would just like to hold my position just at this moment in time because I’ve taken a foreign policy interest in a number of countries but unfortunately Fiji’s not one of them, but I’ll try and find out a bit more about them. Without sort of going into mega detail, what is the cause of the current situation? I mean, what happened?

DF: Okay, well, what happened is, the background on Fiji is there have been a number of what are basically coups within say the last twenty or thirty years. It has been suspended from the Commonwealth before, back in the late 1980s, although it was reinstated about ten years later. What happened most recently was in 2006 one of the army generals, Commodore Bainimarama basically took over the government, dismissed the sitting, elected government and he’s since torn up the constitution and they’re redrawing it now. Which sounds rather unsympathetic, but there are some rather mitigating elements to it, for instance the fact that the previous
constitution was very heavily biased because there’s a big racial division in Fiji between what they call the ethnic Fijians, who are of Melanesian and Polynesian descent, and then the Indo Fijians, who were descendants of the Indians who were taken over there, I’m giving you a bit of a history lesson here, sorry, forgive me …

LL: No, that’s all right, there’s no problem

DF: But basically the previous constitution stipulated that only a certain number of seats could be occupied by one ethnic group and then another ethnic group could have a certain … so there was an inbuilt bias towards the ethnic Fijians who are slightly in the majority, there’s about a 60:40 split on the island.

LL: What is the total population?

DF: It’s about 900,000.

LL: Um hum.

DF: One of the things they are keen to do is see if they can get an all-party parliamentary group set up for Fiji because amazingly there isn’t one at the moment and that was one of the things I was going to ask if you were interested in helping out with?

LL: Okay … I’d have to check, as you know there are endless APPGs, is there one for South Pacific Islands or something?

DF: There is, now the trouble with that one, the South Pacific one, is that all the other islands are kind of shunning Fiji at the moment, they’ve suspended it from the Pacific Forum, so it can’t really be seen to be representing, or taking a specific interest, in Fiji’s position because it’s not in tandem with the other islands at the moment.

LL: Right.

DF: What I was going to say, by the way, about the constitution is that the current Prime Minister, who is this Commodore Bainimarama, he is committed to redrawing the constitution or having it redrawn, in a way which doesn’t … isn’t racially divisive and that has drawn some praise and you know this constitution is due any day now, it’s actually slightly overdue now, so points like this are getting lost in the mix and that’s the concern that they’re being a bit kind of railroaded.

LL: What does the outside world have against this new Prime Minister, why is he the cause of the problem, because there was a coup?

DF: Well, because on the face of it he’s a military dictator.

LL: Right, okay.

DF: I mean, that’s putting it in a negative nutshell. But like I say he is committed to having these elections, he’d kept the date consistent—it’s going to be September 2014. He’s been saying that since 2009, but in the meantime all the businesses and interests in Fiji are suffering like you wouldn’t believe, the EU’s sugar allocation has gone south, because they are suspended the EU is set against them, and more to the point, in the meantime it’s China that has stepped into the breach so the Chinese funding has gone up manifold, I mean absolutely through the roof.

LL: Oh right.
DF: So basically the Chinese are pulling Fiji towards them while we are kind of turning our backs. I mean for a long time Australia and New Zealand didn’t even ... after the coup they wouldn’t even have their own official representation on the islands, but that has now changed.

LL: Does he have history?

DF: Sorry?

LL: Does he have history? Is he a well-known person, has he got a bad reputation?

DF: No, no no, I mean, not prior to this. There are no kind of massacres or anything like that. It’s mainly just an issue of censorship, press censorship, because I mean there was a lot of turmoil on the islands and he has brought stability, I mean obviously there are two sides to this and I can appreciate that, but it’s only one side that’s really coming out at the moment. So, what I was going to ask is, if you’re interested in talking further, would it be convenient to have a meet up? We’re based in Westminster.

LL: Yes, at the very minimum I would be very interested to hear more about it. Even if I didn’t get involved it’s in everybody’s interests to know more about these things and to be honest with you there’s so much you can’t be aware of everything by a long chalk. I know you maybe looked me up but I’m chairman of a thing called the European Azerbaijan Society advisory panel …

DF: Yes, I’m aware of that

LL: And we do a lot of work alongside Azerbaijan. It’s a slight pariah and people like me are dedicated to try and make it eventually into the EU but it has got a border problem which is a bit of a mess on all sorts of things, but to be quite blunt about the thing, and I would say it to you, a lot of what I do, it’s too grandiose to say re-educate but to provide a different view to a government in Baku, I mean, they are going about things the wrong bloody way, they are too uptight, they are too uptight about things. I mean if you asked anybody in Baku, if you said to somebody in Baku it looks like rain they’d say rain? You haven’t seen rain like there is in the Nagorno Karabakh mountains. I mean, every conversation, you couldn’t do anything, they were obsessed and the good thing was to get a lot of the guys off that and to think globally and think bigger. Now, that’s only a minor, a sort of thumbnail thing but …

DF: Yes, the influence goes both ways, I totally appreciate that.

LL: Yes, yup, yup. I do think we’ve made a wee bit of a success in Baku, diplomatically in those who don’t in understanding where exactly Azerbaijan is.

DF: It’s interesting you mention that because I had noticed, it’s a very successful campaign, I mean where I live the train stations have now got great big billboards with the whole issue of the Khojaly massacre, is that how you pronounce it?

LL: Oh yes, yes.

DF: You know that that’s really getting it out there, that’s really prominent, and there’s a petition isn’t there, I saw that on the poster so I think that campaign is definitely getting traction.
LL: They are quite well organised. I want to be realistic about this thing, I’m a bit of a jigsaw, I’m only the chairman of the advisory board, that’s a slightly larger piece in the jigsaw than others but I’m still only a part of a jigsaw I couldn’t in all conscience take responsibility for that but I’m very pleased to be part of the campaign, you know. None the least for the fact that it’s a Muslim [inaudible] communist democracy what we cannot have is an EU which is a rich Christian man’s club [inaudible]. I’m way off on a totally different line, but what are you doing Monday?

DF: Well, Monday is a difficult day for me, I was going to ask if you were around more midweek, Wednesday or Thursday?

LL: Yeah. Yeah, just hold on … Ahh … Just give me one second … Right what day would suit you then?

DF: Well how about … just let me get my diary here … Wednesday afternoon or Thursday morning. Err no, Thursday afternoon. Wednesday afternoon or Thursday afternoon. How about those?

LL: Yeah Wednesday afternoon would be fine for me.

DF: Could we say 3 o’clock?

LL: Yep 3 o’clock is fine … [inaudible]

DF: Well we are right around the corner from you. If it’s more convenient at our offices for a number of reasons. It’s 16 Old Queen Street. It’s just behind Westminster Hall.

LL: Yes oh yes. I know roughly where it is. Well let’s say 3 o’clock and we will have a cup of tea or something. Would that be …

DF: That’s fine. Is that … Can you make [inaudible] because I have a number of meetings that day.

LL: Oh yep. Where …

DF: Its 16 … One-Six Queen Street behind the Queen Elizabeth Centre just across from Parliament Square. Yeah … You’ve got the number there.

LL: Yep

DF: Do you want the postcode too? I mean you shouldn’t need it …

LL: I shouldn’t need it.

DF: And just on the, I mentioned the APPG, I know the Society are quite keen to get one, because it will provide a kind of forum and a platform, is that something you could potentially help with, do you think?

LL: I could, but I would be very reluctant for anybody to spend a lot of time putting up an APPG because they more apparent than real if you know what I mean.

DF: I know, but it’s what they’re asking for, so you’ll understand that they are our clients so we try to …

LL: I know that … we might have to educate the client as well. [Laughter.] Yeah, yeah, you could spend a lot of time putting up an APPG which would probably never meet and there’d be all sorts of … do you have a note of MPs and peers who have been favourable or have spoken about or had anything to do with Fiji?

DF: With Fiji? There are very few. I mean there’s Mr Andrew Rosindell.
LL: Oh well he’s obsessed with any island anywhere.

DF: Yes, but other than him, not really no. Like I said, for the reasons I described the South Pacific APPG isn’t necessarily helpful to us because there is a kind of conflict there because of the division between the rest of the south Pacific and Fiji on this issue, but I mean I have a few people to call, you’re not the only person, but you were definitely someone who it was suggested to me was a good person to talk to about it.

LL: Oh, well somebody has been particularly kind.

DF: Yes, indeed. So I look forward to seeing you next Wednesday 3pm, 16 Old Queen Street. Ok well thank you very much.

LL: Thank you.

DF: Bye.

LL: Bye.

Appendix H: transcript of conversation between Lord Laird and undercover BBC reporters, 13 March 2013

[Telephone rings.]

DF: Here we go. Hello? Thank you very much. Thanks I’ll come through OK, let’s go. Just going to turn this off.

Lord, Laird. I’m Daniel. Good to meet you.

LL: [inaudible] … How you doing, how are you?

DF: Do you want to come through this way?

LL: Sure.

DF: We’re going to be joined by my colleague Gemma. She’s just taking a ‘phone call at the minute but she’ll be through in a second.

LL: OK.

DF: If we go down here. I’ll lead the way.

LL: OK …

DF: Have you been in the House today?

LL: No, [inaudible]. I’ve just been in my office.

DF: Oh, right. You haven’t been affected by the weather then? It was snowing earlier, did you see?

LL: [Inaudible.]

DF: Yeah, but today, earlier, I went for a sandwich and it was fine when I left and snowing when I came out … just … just this place here … erm … take a seat. Gemma will be here in a second. Do you want a tea or a coffee?

LL: A black tea [inaudible].

DF: A black tea, fine. Coming up. See what we got here.

LL: Well where are your offices?

DF: Just in the building upstairs.
LL: Oh, really?
DF: Yeah ...
LL: Oh well that’s very handy, very handy. Oh dear, dear, dear … So how long have you been here in this … this building?
DF: About six months. Did you see the website at all?
LL: No, I didn’t actually.
DF: This is Gemma. Gemma, this is Lord Laird.
LL: Hi, how you doing?
CN: Nice to meet you. Hi, very well thank you.
LL: Good, good, good good.
CN: You braved the horrible weather to get here. Is it still snowing, or not?
DF: No, I was just saying that.
GT: Ah …
GT: Got caught earlier in a snowstorm actually … it was almost a bit like hail, but, erm … snow nevertheless.
DF: Gemma, do you want tea or coffee?
GT: Cup of tea.
DF: Tea, yeah, OK. Yeah, no, I was just saying about … Lord Laird was asking about the, how long we’ve been here and I was saying that, I don’t know if you saw the website … Did you see our website?
LL: No, I didn’t.
DF: OK. Well we’re … we’re actually a Sydney-based company, so this office has only been set up, as I say about six months.
GT: Yes, not long, I don’t know the best restaurants around here yet.
LL: Yeah, yeah.
GT: I assume there are a lot.
LL: Well I don’t know. The point is you live in a sort of rarefied atmosphere, a bubble over there.
[GT and LL talking inaudibly due to sound of DF making tea.]
DF: A lot of people need feeding. No, I’m … This is for Gemma. Yeah, no, no, sorry … Do you want … do you want … do you want sugar? Help yourself. OK I’m going to give you that …
LL: Well you have to feed the peers, you know.
GT: Well, absolutely. I guess you guys have late nights sometimes, so you’ve got to stay there for dinner.
LL: Well [inaudible] it’s usually about 10 o’clock.
GT: Really? That is late, isn’t it?
DF: Do you still have the … the … your company? Is it—biscuit?
LL: No, I don’t I just help out [inaudible] I used to own a company in Belfast. [inaudible].
It’s now 37 years. On 1 March it’s 37 years in existence.

Right? Oh, really?

Yeah.

Congratulations.

Yeah. [Inaudible.] PR company … [inaudible] management.

Yeah …

Yeah.

[Inaudible.] But that’s not bad, 37 years.

No, it’s not.

That’s fantastic. Very good, a real achievement. Especially these days, isn’t it? With things [inaudible] getting tougher and tougher.

Yeah, but I suppose that the point is that there is a sort of [inaudible, bond all?] business as far as [inaudible, your employer?] you deal on a peak return as far on all sorts of stuff. That seems to [inaudible, heavily on that?] I sold 20 … managing director … The whole bloody place took off again [inaudible] because I was saying I was coming over here to … supplement the numbers. With the crazy house. Where are you from?

I’m from Buckinghamshire, originally.

London, originally.

Oh, that’s alright.

It is, yeah.

And where were you born specifically?

Oh, Westminster. Originally.

You mean here?

Well, yeah, I mean …

Not your place!

Not the building, but, err, yeah … But I grew up in Westminster. Yeah, I’m very local. I don’t know how much time you’ve got, so we can …

Within reason yeah.

We spoke a bit on the ‘phone, didn’t we, about the helpful … to reiterate, we work for … we’re employed now by the Society of Friends of Fiji. They want the position with the suspension from the Commonwealth … that’s their main goal is to get that …

That’s the big target?

That’s the big target because it’s having a major effect on the economies and the society is funded by all these industries …

What are the sorts of things that would get them back into the Commonwealth?

Well that’s a good question. I mean, the point is that … the point is that next year, next September, September 2014, there are going to be elections. So we’ll take that as a given. That should, if they go ahead and they’re
considered ... err ... satisfactory ... should result in them being unsuspended. But the society’s concern is that firstly there needs to be a bit of a ... a bit of a ramp up towards that to make sure that the, err ... the image that Fiji’s currently labouring under is mitigated in the run-up to that and secondly, there has to be a bit of a kind of ... a contingency there because there’s no guarantee that they’ll ...  

DF: There ... I mean there ... these businesses are really suffering now and they need to have something done.  

LL: So this is the sugar ...  


GT: [inaudible] You can imagine its affected quite badly.  

LL: Why would ... why ... why would they? I speak out of sheer ignorance so you’ll just have to try ... why would they? I mean if they’re in this club or that club how much of this club or that club why how does that affect tourism?  

GT: Well, I think it’s just about promoting the image of Fiji with the suspension of the Commonwealth ...  

DF: I mean ... yeah ...  

GT: Just generally part of having a maybe not so good image which they’re kind of hoping to improve on so that peo ... there’s no reluctance for people to go to Fiji ...  

DF: They’re being made into ... I mean, we don’t get as much of it over here. In south-east Asia and the Pacific Basin they are like a pariah state. New Zealand and Australia broke off diplomatic ties with them for a long time and ... erm ... in fact there’s been something that’s ... surfaced in the last week since we spoke on YouTube of a ... a video of some soldiers beating a couple of prisoners which has caused a further storm down there. It’s only flickers of it ... flickers of it have come over here ... But erm ... err, they’re ... they’re constantly being beaten with a big cudgel.  

GT: Yeah ...  

DF: And it does have an effect because, people in New Zealand—they’re turned off. And people in Australia and the surrounding areas are turned off from going to ... to Fiji. I mean it’s obviously less likely people go to Fiji from here because it’s so much further ...  

GT: Yes, exactly ...  

LL: That’d be their big tourist market.  

DF: Yeah, yeah ... And the west coast of America.  

GT: In some ways it’s a bit similar to Egypt isn’t it? You know ... when things start happening in a country, you know, rumours spread and people become concerned about going there on holiday. It’s probably the closest example that I would probably understand of somewhere I’d be reluctant to go.  

LL: Well I don’t know, my wife sat and watched the rioting on TV and said “we must go there on our holidays!”  

GT: “That looks rather interesting!”
DF: Which, where, sorry?
LL: Egypt!
DF: Oh right, OK …
LL: “We must go on holiday there!”
DF: Yeah …
GT: It probably reminded her of the pyramids or something. They kept being in shot. They are quite amazing. You should go.
LL: Yeah, I’ll get there sometime. We ended up in Israel being fired at by people from the Gaza Strip so.
DF: Oh, really?
GT: Sounds like you have interesting holidays.
DF: Yes, adventure holidays.
LL: Yeah … I never … don’t worry, don’t worry.
DF: So, anyway. I mentioned to you on the ‘phone about the APPG. I’ve subsequently had further conversations with one of the directors of the Society and I know you were saying and I wanted to talk to this … with you about this, but I know you were kind of saying your view on APPGs … or I got the impression that you felt they were of questionable worth. But it’s definitely a no … a no … a non-negotiable item for our client. So first kind of thing I was going to say is any help you can give with that? Because … um … we’re going to have to set one up basically one way or the other.
LL: OK, and the … the name … the only name you produced on that was Andrew Rosindell.
DF: Well, I haven’t spoken to Andrew Rosindell yet. But I know that he’s obviously, as you know, he’s got an interest in Commonwealth issues. But …
LL: If there’s a rock sticking out the sea anywhere he’s the bloody chairman of the APPG for it.
DF: Yeah …Yeah …
LL: [Inaudible.]
GT: How easy is it to set up an APPG?
LL: Very interesting question. APPGs are not what they seem, really.
GT: Oh really?
LL: Well … err … if I’m in the Commons I’d like to be the chairman of an APPG, especially something that was a wee bit related to my constituency.
GT: Right …
LL: Something that had some sort of relationship. A lot of APPGs never meet.
GT: Really?
DF: Yeah. But then they … then they drop off the list, don’t they, if they never meet, but …
GT: Oh, I see …
LL: Well, yes, but it’s still … the point is that you’re coming into election time now.

LL: I mean you’re only two years away. This is, basically you’re into run-in now.

DF: Mmm. Yeah.

LL: People … people have got to do stuff. So therefore you, err … you say to your friend, “you want me … err, you … you’re an MP and you’re interested in packaging.”

GT: Yes.

LL: So you start the packaging APPG. And I join your APPG and you join my APPG to get the numbers.

GT: Oh, I see.

LL: But then, the point is you need somebody from the opposition.

GT: Yeah.

LL: You need someone from both Houses.

GT: Yes.

LL: You need a … to get … to be properly recognised there’s a sort of formula. But the formulas are easily got round, but … The point is … the … if the … if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it. But the point is that it’s actually a waste of bloody … there’s an awful lot of in running and getting an APPG up off the ground. And it’s … err … for the sheer bloody return you get from the … the … the work. It’s not worth it. It’s actually not bloody worth it.

GT: Mmm …

DF: But isn’t it … doesn’t that depend on what you do with it once you’ve got it because I … I take the point entirely that there are some that lie fallow and nothing really happens with them … they don’t meet and they disappear. But what about the ones that produce … we could produce a report. I mean … what they want is—they want a report produced by the APPG that says how much business is being hit in Fiji.

LL: Well, what makes them think that an APPG will do that?

DF: Well, that’s what they think.

GT: Other APPG’s produce reports, don’t they?

LL: Oh, yes, they produce reports but the point is the report … a lot of it depends … it really depends on the chairman.

GT: On the chairman, right.

LL: Yeah. Because, I mean, he’s got to run the whole thing. He’s … “I’m the chairman of the APPG!” As he stands in some market square looking for votes. You know … he’s the chairman of the APPG. What the hell’s an APP? I don’t know what an APP … Well they’re bloody important whatever it bloody well is … People get confused between select committees and APPGs and all sorts of bloody … they’ve got endless types of committees. And people watch these … this is my opinion on it: they watch these things on TV, you know, so and so appearing, you appearing in
front of a … a select committee and they’re [makes aggressive pointing gestures].

LL: You see … and they don’t know the difference between an APPG and a select committee and all sorts of bloody stuff.

GT: No …

DF: Yes … But I mean what we want … what we … when you say “what makes them think that we could produce that report?” I mean, do you think that’s completely out of character for an APPG or … ?

LL: No, it’s not out of character. It’s just that you let them … you let them start writing a report … you might find the report is the opposite of what you wanted.

GT: Yes.

LL: You have no guarantee over it.

GT: Who actually writes the report? Err … one of the MPs or peers?

LL: Could be, or some … some staffer.

GT: Right …

LL: Or some … some intern on a … on a … you get endless numbers of interns.

GT: Proper interns … ?

LL: Free interns. Who want to make a name by writing stuff.

GT: Right.

LL: Now, the only thing is … let us think … is the APPG going to be funded? Who’s going to fund it …?

DF: Yes. Well yes I was going to say that … that probably makes a big difference. I mean the Society have got a lot of money allocated towards this …

GT: Of course …

LL: This would be very good … how’s the Society going to … Is the Society going to put a lot of money into this?

DF: Yes.

GT: Yes.

DF: Definitely.

LL: I mean … not …

DF: Well how much money are you … ?

LL: We’re not talking millions but the point is we are talking about a substantial sum.

DF: Yes.

GT: Absolutely. Especially because they’re so keen for it to happen, they understand that there’s going to be substantial costs involved and …

DF: When you say substantial, though, can we just quantify that approximately? So I’m … What do you think is reasonable?

LL: Well you’re going to have to take out the APPG to Fiji.
GT: Yeah.
DF: Yes, no we realise that. Yeah.
LL: OK?
DF: Yeah.
LL: And that’s really the time you show them the best bloody time they’ve ever had. You really stick it to them big time.
DF: Yeah …
LL: OK? Bond them together and get them all [inaudible]. So when they get back … when the headache’s over and the hangover and everything else and they get back here then all they can remember is a nice fuzzy glow about this south sea island. Right?
GT: Yes.
DF: Yes.
LL: And it gets them back here because the next time they’re promising I can take my wife. Invite my wife.
DF: So they’re favourable at that point, is that what you mean? Yeah?
LL: Well I would … I would assume so unless … you see the trouble is you’re in a wee bit… you move into a wee bit of an unknown quantity at that time cause there are guys floating about who … particularly in the lower House … It’s all about how you make your name. You know, the George Galloway. He’s the supreme example of it. But, I’m not saying … but the point is a junior George Galloway.
DF: Yeah …
LL: Might say “I, I, I can make my name here in Fiji.”
DF: Yes.
LL: “I’ll go out there and I’ll not like it. And I’ll come back here with a right list of things I don’t like about it.”
DF: Oh, I see. Yes, yeah …
LL: “I’ll go for it …”
GT: You’d have to be careful who you invited …
LL: Well. … within reason. I mean, you can’t sort of … you can’t put a line through it.
DF: But how can we ensure that the people on the APPG are basically, kind of, toeing the line?
LL: You can’t absolutely ensure. You cannot absolutely ensure. Is there any other group …? I’m just thinking aloud here now … is there any other group could go out there and produce a … a document?
DF: Well, the thing is as we mentioned on the … on the … on the ‘phone, the south Pacific APPG is going to have conflict of interest because … and I would have thought they’re more likely to produce a critical document because they’ve also … they’ve also got aves … an area of interest that encompasses all the other islands who have currently suspended Fiji from
the Pacific Forum. So I think we’re running a real … we’re running a real risk with them.

LL: OK. We’re … we’re inside four walls here. What was the … are there valid reasons why they were suspended? I mean … would the guy on the Clapham omnibus agree with that?

DF: Err … Possibly, yeah.

GT: With all these things in, kind of, debate … you know, whether someone deserves to be suspended or not … certainly there was a military coup. That is a problem. But they are moving towards democracy and hoping to have elections.

DF: But the point we want to make is that … the … the businesses, which obviously have no say in whether there’s a democracy in power, they have no say in whether there’s a militaristic regime currently in sway they are the ones who are suffering. So … because we don’t represent the regime. We represent the businesses that are suffering because of the sanctions imposed because of the regime.

LL: Right, let’s be … let’s just … clarify that you’re not representing the government here or any section thereof?

DF: No …

LL: It’s purely business?

DF: That’s right. I mean, obviously there is a crossover in that we … we don’t represent … no … you’re absolutely … that’s absolutely clear and correct. But …

LL: Well that’s a great help actually, I must say.

DF: Yes. But obviously, because we are trying to get the situation … or the attitudes towards Fiji ameliorated that does involve engendering a little bit of balance, if not sympathy, for the current regime. Not … not … not in themselves but just in what they’re trying to do.

LL: What’s the current regime’s view of what the Society … what the Society is doing, or trying to do? How do they get on with the government? How do they get on with the … ?

DF: It’s not hostile.

GT: No …

DF: No, no, not at all.

LL: I mean if …

GT: Kind of cordial relations, I think.

LL: OK. The … if, the … what do you call the … commander? What do you call him?

DF: He’s a Commodore.

LL: Commodore …


LL: It’s like this guy that used to be the dictator of Hungary during … and towards the end of the last war? He was called Admiral Horthy.
DF: Yes ...
LL: But Hungary is landlocked ...
GT: Mmm ...
DF: Yes ...
LL: How the ... how ...
DF: Must be the old Austro-Hungarian ...
GT: [inaudible]
DF: It's a small Navy. Yeah.
LL: Admiral Horthy!
DF: Yes ...
LL: Will become the leader of a landlocked country.
DF: Yes ...
LL: Relations good with the government ...
GT: Mmm hmm ...
DF: Yes. No, not bad. I imagine it's similar actually—you know you mentioned the Azerbaijan. I imagine it's similar to the ... the ... is it the European Azerbaijan Society ... I mean, that's not obviously the government is it but it's ... it's ... probably got similar sympathies and ... and ... there's a sympathy there. I'm guessing, but ...
GT: [inaudible] particular point about the Commonwealth, their interest would certainly be aligned. Both the government and the Society and the business behind it would both want Fiji to be welcomed back into the Commonwealth.
LL: OK ... you're going to ... now let's just think about this. If you're taking a group of politicians ... a business organisation is thinking of taking a group of politicians ... what those politicians ... we know ... “oh, very nice, nice swimming pool there. Oh yes, that's a nice [inaudible]” ...
GT: Yes ...
LL: But they'll want to get to the politics of the thing. So they'll want to meet ... err ... what ... Commandant ...what's it ... ?
GT: Commodore.
DF: Commodore ... Commodore. Yeah, it's a naval rank.
LL: You want ... you want ... they want to meet the Commodore. And they'll want to put him through questioning.
DF: Yeah ...
LL: Alright. Now could he stick, I mean ... would he be ... would he give the right answers?
DF: Depends what the right ... depends what you mean by the right answers.
LL: Have they a free press?
DF: Not as such, no.
LL: OK. Can they defend that?
DF: Well they defend it by saying that, err … I think I said this on the ‘phone but previously Fiji’s been a very volatile place … I mean there’ve been riots and what not. And Bainimarama, who’s the Commodore, his position is he has restored, err … restored equilibrium to the … to the islands. And that the reason he’s got continuing censorship on the press is because he doesn’t want the whole situation re-enflamed before the elections.

LL: You see, that is going to be the big thing.

DF: Mmm …

LL: That’s the thing they will go for big time. Abuse of human rights and freedom of the press. I mean … In Tottenham there were riots.

GT: Yes.

DF: Yes.

LL: But they didn’t, to my knowledge … nobody restricted the press.

DF: Yeah …

LL: Or took out their MP or something.

DF: No, sure … Yeah …

LL: You know … Ah, a good idea though. Nobody did that! [Inaudible, ah, right?] Now … in … in my experience on Azerbaijan … er … the … I mean, just think of this being said to a PR guy like me, well we’re not against the press. The press tell us where they’re going, what questions they’re going to ask and to whom, and on what dates, we’ll organise that for them. So I says back to them, I don’t know a single press man worth the name of press man who would take you up on those conditions and they can’t understand that …

DF: No.

GT: No, it’s an extremely different approach, isn’t it?

LL: Well, that … they’re former Soviets so that’s … they have a … I mean, it’s the … you know, you’re not old enough to remember the Who …

GT: No.

LL: You are?

DF: I am, yes.

LL: Oh, God. I knew by the look of him he’s old enough to remember the Who.

DF: [Laughs.]

LL: The Who … remember the Who had a song about, you know, the, err … “Don’t get fooled again.”

DF: Oh yes, yeah. Yeah.

LL: “The party of … the party of the right is now the party of the left” …

DF: Right, yeah …

LL: “I’m sick of it and I’ll just sit and strum my guitar …”

DF: Yes …
These are the guys who are ... and Azerbaijan—those were the guys who ran the communist regime. Yeah. And they’re all capitalists. It’s the same bloody people running the same bloody place.

Yeah.

Makes no difference.

Yes ... yeah ...

How did it work ... if you’re on another APPG, how did that one get set up? Was that easy to set up, or ...?

Well ...

Oh, the Azerbaijan one?

Yeah ...

Yes ... we didn’t have a lot to do with the APPG.

Oh, right.

[inaudible] ... err, the APPG does its own thing because it sort of keeps ... it keeps 'em right and we will subsidise a run out to Azerbaijan with the APPG. And, by definition ... there's a hell of a balance to be got at between being seen to manipulate the APPG and manipulating the APPG.

[Laughs.]

You know ... it’s ... now the point is Azerbaijan is slightly different in that Azerbaijan ... there’s a lot of people like me and ... I’m terribly dedicated to Azerbaijan because I want to move the country into the EU. Because if we’re simply seen as a rich Christian man’s club then I mean I would get peeved.

If you’re a Muslim you’d get peeved.

Yeah. Yeah.

Now, they ... they consider themselves to be a democracy. Well, then ... I mean, what’s a democracy if it’s somebody living in a safe Tory seat over here? They haven’t a chance ... you know ... what is democracy and how does it work and who’s ... and because they’re not ... Azerbaijan’s [inaudible] because they’re mega rich. I mean, they’re knee deep in money.

Yes, sure.

Oil. Big time. They have got a city where the roads are not tarmacked, they’re marbled.

Really?

Really?

Yeah.

Oh my goodness. Is that practical? Somebody might skid on it ...

It doesn’t matter ... when you go down the motorways in Azerbaijan the crash barriers are works of art.

Really?

They spend that ... I mean, they just spend money.
GT: It sounds like they've got money coming out of their ears.

DF: Yes. Money to burn.

LL: They do actually … I remember some guy telling me the amount of money the government made per day taxing BA … err … BP … I can’t remember what the figure is but it’s mindbog …

GT: It’s something crazy.

LL: Mind … you know … it’s away with it. It’s away with it … it’s away with it altogether. [Inaudible.]

GT: Yeah.

LL: They are wealthy. So … it’s not … just a terrible … it’s not a terribly good comparison.

DF: Did the Azerbaijan APPG already exist before the European Azerbaijan Society?

LL: It nominally existed. We pumped life into it.

DF: Right.

LL: But at least it was there. OK.

GT: Who set it up? How did it come about?

LL: Actually I think it was set up by your MP. What do you call him? City of London …

DF: Oh, Mark Field, is it?

LL: Yes, exactly.

DF: Yeah. Oh, right.

LL: He’s the chairman of it for a long time. It’s now gone to the guy who’s the fellow called Chris … Chris something … He’s the MP for Tamworth.

DF: Right.

GT: Right.

LL: Err … Chris Pincher. Chris Pincher. And, err …

DF: So it doesn’t do much, then? The APPG?

LL: Well, actually it is quite … well it goes out at least once a year to Azerbaijan …

DF: Yes.

LL: OK … ? And it runs all the various little ceremonies. I mean, it’s a Muslim country but it runs its Christmas parties here for the MPs and all that …

GT: Does it really?

LL: And if there’s any … if there’s a wee shortfall in money or if they want to do something then that’ll be … it’ll be all sorted but that’s … but that’s not the … that’s not the big thing.

LL: See you’re … what I didn’t appreciate until I sat down here was that you’re actually … you’re actually looking after the businesses.

DF: Mmm …

LL: Most of those are, what, tourists? Tourist businesses … ?
DF: Well, not all, no. As I say, some of them are sugar, timber.

LL: Sugar? … is timber big?

DF: Yeah. So it's a conglomeration. Timber's big but sugar's bigger.

LL: Right … what, er, the average person, what's … what's the standard of living for the average person in Fiji?

DF: Err … I can't give you a figure, but I mean it's … it's obviously below ours.

LL: Yeah, but it's not … it's not great, I mean it's not … would be regarded as third world in terms …

DF: No … the GDP, and given that the population as told you is under a million, the GDP is something like four million. Sorry four billion. What am I saying, four million? Four billion.

LL: Right … but I mean, it's not … it's not, sort of crushing …

DF: No it's not crushing poverty, no …

LL: Crushing poverty, peasant-type society?

GT: No.

DF: No.

LL: There is a certain … there's [inaudible].

DF: Yes … It varies, but I mean yes it's not … it's not, erm … you know, it's not Haiti.

LL: Right. Now … Sorry for asking this question again, give me the … can you give me the exact reasons they were expelled from the Commonwealth?

DF: Yes, it's purely down to the suspension of democratic elections.

LL: Which would lead me to ask the question then, why is their elections in September of next year?

DF: Well, that's a good question. But there has been … the posi—there has been … Commodore Bainimarama’s consistent position since 2009.

GT: Yeah …

DF: Is that it would take that time to redraw a constitution … because I think, as I mentioned on the 'phone, there were question marks previously about the … the nature of the constitution, because it had a kind of … an ethnic element to how the seats were divided up.

DF: Because there are two main ethnic groups in Fiji. The ethnic Fijians, as they’re known, and the Indo-Fijians. And they’re both large constituent elements … about a 60/40 split. And … and the previous constitution provided for a certain number of seats for one group and a certain number for the other. And … and also I think it was the case that the … the Prime Minister could only be an ethnic Fijian. And although Bainimarama is an ethnic Fijian, he is arguing that that was intrinsically racist and therefore … and therefore needs to be redrawn and … and that is what he is saying … that together with the unrest was the reason he took over the government.

LL: What … what caused the unrest?

DF: Well, ethnic … ethnic inter-racial strife. Basically. I mean, there is a lot of tension.
LL: Why is there tension? Is one better off than the other, or ... ?

DF: I think it’s very historical. I mean, they’re kind of chalk and cheese as communities. The Indians retain a lot of their Indian heritage and ... and, err ... creeds. And whereas the ... the ethnic Fijians, as they’re known, are an amalgam of Melanesian and Polynesian. They look distinctive physically you’d ...

DF: Kind of ... identify an ethnic Fijian. Visually. And there’s just ... there’s just tension between them. I mean, some ... it’s a kind of racial thing. They’re not fully integrated.

LL: What’s the legal system like?

DF: Well, unfortunately he’s ... that’s another thing ... Baini ... Banimarama did actually dismiss all the judiciary when ... when they ruled that his ... his coup was illegal. So that’s in flux, we should say. Basically. But, err ... well let me ... can I just make some ... some points that may ... you can tell me what you think. Erm ... and these are things that have come from the Society as much as from us, but ... they believe that, err ... I mean, the kind of things they’re interested in getting are, umm ... they want to raise the profile of ... of the situation and how it’s affecting everyday Fijians. And they also want to get attention. So ... one of the things they’re looking for is a visit from one of our Foreign Office.

DF: Erm ... you know, Hague or Hugo Swire, who’s got the brief for that area I think. Erm ... and even royalty cause the Queen hasn’t been there since 1987. And they believe that if she turned up, or even senior royalty ... then that would, kind of you know ...

GT: It would certainly draw attention ...

DF: It would draw attention and look sympathetic and help with the whole Commonwealth thing. So we were wondering whether ... well one of the things we’re looking for as part of any consultancies is whether someone can, kind of, raise that issue for us. Erm ...

LL: Well I can raise the issue. I just don’t think in the current situation you’re going to get royalty at all full stop.

DF: No, unlikely at this point, yeah ...

LL: Full stop, I mean, full stop. Err. ... you might be able to create conditions where you’d get a junior Foreign Office minister.

DF: Yeah ...

GT: That would certainly be a step in the right direction.

LL: Yeah ... but to get to this direction you’ve got to walk. You know ... bit of walking to be done.

GT: Yeah ...

DF: Yes.

DF: How can we get things raised in the House, though? I mean, you know, are early day motions any worth, do you think?

LL: Yeah, but they’ve got to be controlled. Let’s just, let’s just ...

DF: I know that’s not within your remit, but ...

LL: Does there ... why not?
DF: Oh, right. OK.
LL: We’ve a similar thing in the Lords.
GT: Oh right.
DF: Fine. OK. OK.
LL: We can raise whatever we want. Erm … Do any of their senior guys … does the Commodore come over here?
DF: No.
LL: Why?
DF: Well, I don’t know. I can’t answer for him on that but he hasn’t … I think he’s probably worried about his security, I imagine. I don’t know. I mean, I’m not aware of him coming over here. I don’t think it’s on the … the plans.
LL: Do any of the senior people come over here?
DF: Err, yes. The President was over here last August. And met with Jeremy Browne, who’s in the … the minister in charge of that area. But you see …
LL: Who’s the President? What’s his dealings?
DF: He … he’s basically, err … he’s in control of … being controlled by the Prime Minister, Bainimarama. Nailatikau his name is.
LL: But he is still the President so he can draw a crowd?
DF: Yes. Indeed, yeah.
LL: Are there many expatriates living over here?
DF: There is … there are, yeah.
LL: How many?
DF: Diaspora … I haven’t got a figure on it.
LL: Where do they live? I mean … are there a particular area?
DF: Err, I think east London’s got quite a community.
LL: Is there anybody that’s got those documented?
DF: The thing is that … the big thing about Fijians is that they’re big rugby players. And there are a lot of Fijians in the British army. It’s the second largest foreign contingent after the Gurkhas. You know, talking about a couple of thousand plus. And …
LL: Still today?
LL: Almost the whole of the bloody army.
DF: Yes. Quite. Yeah, yeah. And they’re very … you know, there’s a … I mean, most people who don’t know anything about Fiji would associate Fiji with rugby.
LL: Yeah.
DF: So there are some prominent players within the rugby leagues in this country who are Fijian … and would be, you know, if not household names then approaching it.
LL: Can you take a position in running this campaign where you’re … where you’re saying, “this is an education process …”

DF: Mmm hmm …

LL: “It’s a two-way education process.”

DF: Yes …

LL: “We got to educate the people of the UK as to Fiji and what their problems are and it’s not easy and it’s not nice … this is not Surbiton.”

DF: Mmm …

LL: Alright? And then can you turn that around and say, “well, we also want to educate and bring into the … the sort of modern way of thinking, 21st century thinking, the people of Fiji.”

DF: Yes.

LL: Can you do that?

DF: Yes … Well, I mean … that’s … that will be, err … I thought you were going to say the Fijian regime which we have less traction with than perhaps you did with the Azerbaijan situation, I don’t know. But … if it’s to … because you were saying on the ‘phone about re-educating the … somebody …

LL: Azerbaijanis …

DF: Yeah …

LL: Yeah. That’s a different … yeah, that … that’s … yeah. The trouble with … the trouble with the Azerbaijanis and this might be of interest to you … is that because they’re former Soviets, and the … the guys over 40 are former Soviets big time. They appoint me … let’s say as the chairman of the European Azerbaijan Advisory Board. Then when I give them advice they get all “Oh … but we thought you were our friend and now you’re criticism us.”

GT: They don’t always like your advice …

LL: And I say, “well look, a friend is somebody who says … when you’re … go down and speak with that tie on, and that shirt people laugh at … laugh at you, change it … an enemy lets you go down the street and be laughed at.” They can’t … actually …

DF: They struggle with that?

LL: Look, let me give you a … let me give you an example. One time we were in Baku … we were doing some stuff [inaudible sentence] on a place like … it’s … criminal. It’s criminal [inaudible, the way?] … It’s only half the bloody land is [inaudible]. It’s all owned by the state. The farmers are basically all peasants. The farm … the whole damn farming thing should be changed. Tourism … apart from Tony Adams you don’t really get tourists …

GT: I was going to say, is there much tourism?

DF: Yeah …

LL: No. Very, very, very little. You see, they don’t really need any of this … they are so …
GT: They're so wealthy.
LL: Well. OK. There's ... there's no middle class which worries me a bit ... well there is middle class, it's about two or three per cent. There's really, effectively no middle class which in ... which is the big thing which would work up a democracy.
GT: Yeah.
LL: What was the point I was trying to make?
DF: I think you were speaking to the point I made about the regime and getting them to, err, listen.
GT: Re-educating the regime.
LL: Yeah. We had guys in ... actually, they came my home city, Belfast. Talking some senior civil servants in the Department of Agriculture over there. Guys in their fifties who are at the top of the tree or near the top of the tree and they're putting down [inaudible, papers?] policy. And one of the guys, in perfect English, because these guys can speak perfect English, he said, "Look ..." I'm putting it in Belfast language ... "You see that policy? We can put that policy ... as good as any civil service in the world. But what we can't do is think out of the box. We can't develop it. We can administrate but we can't develop because we don't know how. We have never been shown how to develop it." And what a hell of a thing for a senior civil servant to admit. But he's right. They have no concept ... they're totally tunnel vision. I mean there's actually very ... have you been to behind the old Iron Curtain, to the Soviet states?
GT: No.
LL: Have you?
DF: Yes.
LL: Yeah. Well you probably know a wee bit about what I'm talking about.
DF: Yeah ...
LL: Did you work there or was it touristy?
DF: No, I've been there on business. Yeah ...
LL: Yeah, well then you know. It's not ... It's going to take years to get the whole sort of thing out of their system.
GT: It's a bit like China, actually, isn't it?
DF: Yeah.
LL: Yeah.
GT: They aren't able to, kind of, think for themselves.
LL: Exactly. That was the whole thing about Viagra, if you remember the story. Perhaps you don't ...
GT: [Inaudible, the Chinese something.]
LL: Are you too young ... is she too young ... can I ...
DF: You can say Viagra, yeah.
LL: Can I say Viagra ...?
GT: Really … I just don’t know that story.

LL: Well it’s a very … it’s a very … it might be apocryphal this way … a way back, some … many millennia, many decades ago the Chinese government got at some of the top medical science to invent something … I forget what it … verucas or some bloody things. Something or other … “get a solution for that.” And these guys worked away for a lot, the whole decade pouring test tubes into other test tubes, writing reports, looking up there, looking up there, thinking about it, having brainstorms, and the only chemical they got was this one which had an effect on the male genitalia … which … she wouldn’t be familiar?

DF: Yes, no, she’s heard about it. She has.

LL: She’s not convent educated?

GT: [Laughs.]

LL: Are you convent educated?

DF: If she was she’d definitely know anyway.

LL: Well, [inaudible joke]. Anyway, the point is that’s all they could get was this bloody stuff which had an effect on …

DF: Yeah …

LL: So they … grumbled away and they parcelled up their files because the funding was taken away and the bumf, stuck it away in a couple of big stores and bugged off complaining, hmm hmm and the government complained a waste of bloody money. And it sat there for about 20 years. Until somebody reviewing files realised they had a solution for another problem.

GT: Oh …

LL: But they couldn’t see that.

DF: Yeah.

LL: They were told to get verucas.

GT: Yes. They couldn’t realise they’d come across something else.

LL: Now … I know this doesn’t affect you … erectile dysfunction … They had the answer to erectile dysfunction.

DF: Yes.

LL: But all they were …

GT: No, they’re too …

LL: Never, ever thought …

DF: Yeah. So they couldn’t see the wood for the trees. No.

GT: [inaudible] how much money they could have made …

LL: They couldn’t see the wood for the verucas. Now that may be partly or totally apocryphal but it tells a story. Right? Now as to the problem … what … it’s not just a case of portraying Fiji over here as girls in miniskirts or hula or what … grass skirts and all the other stuff …

GT: A lovely place to go on holiday.
LL: Yeah. That’s fine … but why not try and do the educating bit … that this is a country that, you know, has come from … from … I don’t know, I’m making this up as I go along. Come from bugger all, has pulled itself together, got going, it has ethnic difficulties but then show us the bloody country that hasn’t ethnic difficulties. Look at immigration here, I mean we’ve ethnic …

DF: Yes, yeah, yeah …

LL: So we can’t be going round lecturing people. So it’s got … so it’s got problems, so it’s got this, so it’s got that, so … it has done a thing which … you can’t actually say this, but you can imply that they have solved their need to redo their constitution in the kind of South Afr … south seas type way of doing it. And that is by a coup. This is not Surbiton. This is not east… well, actually that’s a bad example. Surbiton … This is not Surbiton. So you can’t, sort of, have a nice election … this is the way it’s done. It’s not … I know it’s not acceptable, it’s not understandable in western Europe, it’s not acceptable … but this country is making strides. And you need this country in terms of the future because this country is where there is a lot of 21st-century thinking. Where there’s a lot of people who … who, err … who want to think out of the box. Why don’t you try and get a situat … and I’m only thinking and speaking at the same time.

DF: Mmm …

LL: Where the word Fiji means new idea

DF: Mmm … yeah ... there’s a parallel as well, by the way, with … you remember all the … before the run-up to the second Gulf war, when the sanctions were biting in Iraq. I’m not comparing Fiji directly with Iraq, but there were sanctions … There was a lot of what you might call propaganda coming out on the effect that this was having on the population. And why should they suffer just because their leader was this, you know, bad guy.

GT: Yeah …

DF: Well, I mean, again, I mean what I was wondering was: that point which is, completely, I mean, no-one in Britain would have any clue about that point, which is what we’re basically being employed to get out there … that point would surely work well in a … in a … in a debate in the House. If we … if one could be engineered. Would you … would you be able to help with that?

LL: Yeah, but I mean again, you see, I don’t believe, you see, your client would love a debate. Because he likes to read Hansard, page after page after page, but if you run a debate, the minister who’s answering the debate will have been given all the answers from the civil servants. The clever thing in all these situations is to have a sufficient number of people gened up all over the place about … about Fiji that they can either with a flash of their brain suddenly or even have it even organised, throw into another debate …

GT: Oh, I see, a debate that’s not specifically about Fiji …

DF: Yes …

GT: And then bring it up …

LL: Because then you’ll get the minister to make a fluff.

DF: Ah, right. Take them by surprise.
GT: Yeah …

LL: He hasn’t been prepared so he’ll [makes fluffing noise]. Oh, we’ll consider that yes, because that’s what they’ll say, oh we’ll consider that. Then you’ve get them to say that then you’ve got them on a wee bit of a hook, but the point is, look if you run a debate you are holding a bull fight in a circus, or something like that, I’m mixing all my metaphors, so all the anti people and all the [inaudible], they’ll be there.

GT: They’ll be ready.

LL: But if you are an MP and you are … you are a friend of Fiji’s … OK … and you take a few opportunities to say a few words every now and again …

GT: Yes …

LL: Always on some other debate, “oh taking Fiji as an example, Mr Prime Minister …”

GT: Look at the changes they made over there.

LL: Exactly. “Can we not involve the experts from Fiji on this particular topic.” All that … then …

GT: How’s best to do that? Is it the other people which are on the APPG or would you be able to find us people to …?

LL: Ah … you see, the APPG … you’re going to get the APPG people. But the best bet is to … look, the ideal person you want is a range of people in all parties, in both Houses, who are not necessarily involved, and probably better if they’re not involved with the APPG.

GT: Right …

LL: Who are just overcome with what they’ve heard about Fiji. Now … what have they heard about Fiji? Is Fiji suspended from the Parliament … Commonwealth Parliamentary Association?

DF: Not that I’m aware of. I’ll have to check that.

GT: Yes … I know it’s obviously been suspended from the Commonwealth.

LL: Yes … yeah …

DF: OK.

LL: So … can … is there still a parliament going or is it all down to the Commodore?

DF: Err, no. There’s no parliament. Well … err, there’s no functioning parliament. No.

LL: Have you talked to the Foreign Office?

DF: No.

LL: It would be in the Foreign Office’s interest to get Fiji back in the Commonwealth.

GT: Do you think … why would it be beneficial?

LL: Well, it’s always … in politics everybody wants to empire-build. You know … and OK, it might only be a smudge on the map but the point is it’s still a smudge on a map a lot of people have heard of. So … and … and …
GT: Who would be best to speak to in the Foreign Office about it, do you have any contacts there, or ... ?

LL: Och, pick up contacts ... they must have a section which is ... probably because Fiji's so small they've got a section which is ... south seas, or ...

DF: Yeah, there is. It comes under Hugo Swire. He's ... it's part of his brief.

LL: Then they will have a whole team of people who are experts do that, do that [imitates experts carrying out tasks].


LL: They don't get any money from the ... development, overseas development, do you?

DF: Yes, they do. A lot of it's been suspended now. The only money ... you mean from us?

LL: Yes.

DF: No. Not directly, no.

LL: Did they ... have they got before?

DF: I think they did, yes. I was looking at the figures a couple of weeks ago, actually. Mind you, it's been cut across the board, really. Erm ... but they were, now they're only getting it indirectly through NGOs.

LL: What NGOs?

DF: Err ... I can't name them off the top of my head. Erm ... I think the usual suspects.

LL: What about sending a team of academics out?

DF: Yep.

LL: Let's be different

GT: To write a report, you mean, or ... ?

LL: No, no, no, no. To help educate ... OK ... you are now working on the line that there's a lot of people ... in ... business, the decision-making ... decision-makers in Fiji ... the decision-makers in Fiji are not ... up to speed. They're probably, I mean ... did you ever live on an island?

GT: Have I ever lived on an island?

LL: Yeah ...

DF: Other than Britain?

GT: Yeah ...

LL: I mean these small islands. I've got a place in the Isle of Man, I'm very fond of the Isle of Man. But the point is this: you know these guys, if you live on the Isle of Man, there is this thing called "island fever". Especially if you've been used to living somewhere other than the Isle of Man. And I've talked to David Waddington, remember the former Home Secretary who was the Governor of Bermuda. And, I mean, Bermuda's full of expatriates but they all have to get off every so often ...

GT: Oh, really? Oh, they go stir crazy ...

LL: Exactly. Now Fiji is not big.
LL: But what you’ve got is a lot of people who … if you had something to get them to think out of the box …

DF: Yes.

LL: Identify the key decision-makers. You’re going to have the election next September.

DF: Mmm.

LL: Where are you going to … where are you going to get the candidates? And how you going to be … unless you get the right candidates who have been helped by candidates here … by parliamentarians here, you can … because this has got to be a clean sweep, in a sense. You’ve got to get as many new people as you can.

DF: Yeah.

LL: And looking for young, well-educated males and females … one-legged Jew and whatever else … whatever other minorities you’ve got. What about setting up something over there to aid democracy?

DF: Yes …

LL: And get them to think out of the box? It’s … I know it’s stupid, but I’m very taken … I’m, sort of, very affected by what those civil servants said to me in Azerbaijan, you know … “we can’t think out of the box.”

DF: Yeah, yeah …

GT: Help them do that.

LL: “No-one’s ever told us how to think out of the box.” It sounds so fricking bloody … because that’s what we all … especially in the profession that the three of us are and were in. The whole … the whole … the whole purpose of our industry is to think differently.

GT: Yeah.

DF: But don’t you find that the … aren’t the Azerbaijanis … aren’t they a bit obsessed with … because, I know obviously the issues that they’re most concerned with …

LL: Nagorno Karabakh.

DF: Yes, absolutely. Aren’t they obsessed with getting that, as you put it, in Hansard, or whatever? Because I mean …

LL: Yeah. But the point … But the point is that’s … that’s fine. But I think … I think why they elected me, or appointed me the chairman and I think why I actually get on so well with them, is because I berated them. I give them … I mean I did actually the first bloody meeting … I give them stick. I said look I come from Northern Ireland. I mean, you know … we’ve … we’ve similar mess, not to the extent that you guys have, we’ve similar mess. But you know the only way we began to move on out of that was to think big. If we simply think that a wee small hen run, and relate everything back to the hen run, then nobody wants to be our friend. Nobody wants to talk to us. Boring. It’s so boring. But if we have views on climate change. We’ve views on the new banking system. We’ve views, we’ve views, we’ve views. Oh yes, but there’s a problem on the border now. I know there’s a problem on the
border, but that’s for small people, for small minds and that’ll eventually be sorted out. We want to take our place on the world stage as the big guys. So Fiji wants to take its place on the … on the stage, let’s say, of the South Pacific. Who are the … there’s bound to be … how do … how are they affected by climate change? By more water … I mean are they actually being covered up?

DF: Good point, yeah. Good point.

LL: Are they?

DF: I don’t know.

LL: Well have they done any work on this?

DF: I think there has been some work done on it because they’ve got a lot of smaller islands that are going to be affected.

LL: Right … should they not be leading the world in thinking about climate change?

GT: Yes …

LL: So people know them not for having coups, but for having climate change. Thinking out of the box.

GT: Something positive.

LL: Yeah. And other things as well. You got to push the rugby. Push the rugby as hard as you can. Push whatever, you know, you can do …

GT: You know what clients are like, though, they sometimes just like to get things that are on paper, in terms of getting something in the public’s eye.

DF: Yeah, yeah …

LL: Bloody pain in the arse if you ask me.

GT: Well, absolutely. And then, but I think for us … and you’ve [probably had experience of this as well … sometimes your client just needs to see something. And say “look, this is in Hansard. This is achievable. Yes, we’ve set up the APPG. Great, and anyway let’s move on.”

LL: OK. Let’s think about this. What are the local papers like down in Fiji?

DF: The newspapers, you mean? Well they’re pretty tame at the moment because they’re under … they’ve got government censors in their newsrooms?

LL: TV?

DF: Yeah.

GT: Yes.

LL: Are you supplying stuff to them?

DF: Not yet. I mean, we’ve only taken this on pretty recently.

LL: Right. Well, surely that should be, look you can endless [inaudible] this bloody place.

DF: But convincing the TV in Fiji isn’t the issue because they’re all … they’re, kind of …

LL: No, no, I’m only convincing your client.
DF: Yes, yeah yeah. Yeah.
GT: Yeah ...
LL: So … a senior Fiji person meets the second … the second chauffeur for Prince Harry. God, beat that.
GT: Perfect [laughs].
DF: Mmm. Yeah. Can I just ask something fundamental as well? I mean, because we’ve talked all about it and what you’ve said is very interesting. Are you interested in doing some consultancy work for us and the Society?
LL: Yeah … it just depends on the level and all that sort of stuff. I mean, I like this type of thing because it’s the challenge …
DF: Yes, I can see that. Yeah.
LL: Not just your average stuff this … I mean, if you’re … I will be if you want me … I will be coming in on the unusual angles. Different angles. Because there’s no point going down the well worn [inaudible] paths. Let’s look at this thing totally differently.
DF: Well can I ask that … would it be possible … because I’m … I can see that you look at it another way and I can see why you’re valued for that. Is it possible to do that and … I’ve made a list of some of the … the … some of the more out of the box suggestions you’ve made. But can we also call upon you to do some of the bog standards that will just please our client a la raising things in the House? Is that also …?
LL: Yeah … I’ll not things myself but we’ll get other people if you like that’s the point.
DF: Oh, right.
GT: That would be quite useful.
LL: But this is a process. We’ve got to get a few people interested in … is there a Fiji Commission over? A High Commissioner?
DF: Yes. Yes.
LL: What’s he or she like?
DF: Err, I haven’t … I haven’t … I haven’t met him. But, erm …
GT: But yes, you think they’re …
DF: Sympathetic to our position, though definitely. We’ve definitely got hooks into that through the Society, yeah. When you say you won’t raise those things, I mean how will we get other people to raise them, then? I mean …
GT: You can speak to them on our behalf?
LL: Well you see the point is, if I take this on, obviously there is, I would be doing it for monetary reward, and I don’t want … I don’t want to be having to unveil that because it weakens the position.
DF: Right.
LL: Plus the fact that it’s much better … I’d have to list my interests … who I worked for whatever … the organisation is, that’s not a big issue, but if I asked a question I have to declare an interest. Now that doesn’t stop me, we can still do that. That’s fine. But you want more than me. You don’t … you
don’t want it sounding as if the only bloody person in Parliament who raises any bloody thing about Fiji is the guy they pay.

DF: No, I understand that.

GT: It would be really useful if you could help us find other people.

LL: Yes …

GT: And we could have a whole team.

LL: Yes. Have a number. Crossbench, because a lot of people are across the board. Even, like … let’s be realistic, and your client will know this if he’s honest, a lot of people will come on because they think they might get a run out to Fiji.

DF: Yes.

LL: Human nature.

GT: Yes, well absolutely. And I can sympathise with that.

LL: I do, I just, having said all that, I want to make … there is one bloody point that in the Palace of Westminster you could actually spend your life … your entire life, going on freebies … and they’re chasing you every day for freebies.

GT: Lucky you.

LL: No, no, no. Cause you can’t … it’s too … it’s too … you’ve got to do work. Quite seriously they [inaudible]. But Fiji has got that slightly more mysterious … sunny …

DF: Exotic.

LL: Exotic.

GT: Yeah. Lovely, yeah.

LL: You know, you can … there’s something slightly different there.

GT: Yes, I can see why people would be interested.

LL: Yes …

DF: Are we talking about getting … this is a, a … a trip to get us people on the APPG? Is that what you mean?

GT: Or to help out, I guess … ?

LL: It’s a bri … I’ll deny having said this but it’s a kind of bribe.

DF: Right.

LL: Like, the sort of thing I can say to these guys “look, you put that question down now, I thought you were interested in Fiji, would you like to come down to it, you know, I believe it’s quite nice.” But that’s why I can say that.

GT: Yes.

DF: Right.

GT: Well, you can certainly say …

LL: I can whisper that.

DF: So you can broker that but you can’t ask it yourself cause it’s too obvious?
LL: Look, I'm not ... there are rules, and you cannot break the rules.

DF: Sure.

LL: If you want to break the rules, I would be acting, let's say, like a consultant who just happens to be in Parliament but not using my position in Parliament because that I think is not, that's not correct, if you follow my point.

DF: Yeah.

LL: I mean, let's be, let's be, let's be very honest about this. If you had an ex-MP or something like that, it'd be the same sort of skills he'd be coming out with. If I was an ex-MP ... I am actually an ex-MP, but ...

GT: Come to think of it ...

LL: I am ... but I mean if, you know ... but I'm stuck in the Lords for all eternity ... and remember what Woody Allen said about eternity?

GT: Err, no, I don't actually.

LL: Ah, well he said it was OK, but the last bit was a bit long.

GT: At least you've got ten restaurants in there, haven't you?

LL: Yeah ...

DF: Purgatory's not too bad, is it, no ...

GT: Yes, exactly ...

LL: Some of the bars you can't get into for bloody bishops, but that's ...

GT: Oh ... Actually, one thing that would be quite useful to know ... I don't know how your consultancy fees normally work ... do you normally do it, kind of per day or ... you're on a retainer?

LL: Well I would be ... I would be suggesting a retainer ...

GT: And what would that normally be approximately?

LL: Well you see, this is one of those things. I don't know.

DF: Yeah ...

LL: What the work is. But ... I mean I do want ... just let me underline this point again. I will not be ... and you wouldn't expect, you're not asking ... just so there's no misunderstanding I wouldn't be involved in anything other than good and proper ... orchestrated, organised lobbying. And putting up a case. And I don't want ... I will not be misusing my position as ... I'm just using the expertise gained, if you like, and the knowledge gained.

DF: Yep.

LL: And ... I will be very keen to ... to involve myself. But ... I just ... it all depends on the amount of work. It all depends on the amount of work and we're probably talking about ... well you're probably talking about starting at 2,000 a month anyway.

GT: Mmm.

LL: OK? That would be the sort of minimum if I were to do anything. But ... I would be ... I would be quite keen on the thing but I do ... I do want ... I do want to make the other point that I'd be looking at this thing differently.
GT: Yes, I think that would be very valuable, actually.
DF: Yes, no I gather that. No, you’ve made some very interesting points.
GT: I think that would be to very valuable to look at it differently.
LL: Well, you see, one of the things I can’t understand as a former lobbyist myself is … as an MP, peer, PR guy, I suppose a lobbyist and the House of Lords … is how dreadfully poor lobbying is. It is unbelievable. I just can’t believe how poor it is. It’s lacking in thought, it’s lacking … it’s as if people are just thrown in. I mean as if somebody has been a fitter until Friday and then on Monday he starts as a lobbyist.
DF: Yeah …
LL: Seriously. It is … it’s … it’s a shambles. And I’ll tell you one thing: I’ve had so many examples of this … if lobbying was on there, if the client knew, it’s actually damaging … [inaudible] lobbying for.
DF: Oh, really?
LL: Turning people off and turning people …
GT: Well, yes, you’ve got to be so careful …
LL: You’ve got to be very, very careful. This is a very careful operation.
GT: Yeah …
LL: And the greatest … the enemy in this one is the client.
GT: Yes …
LL: [inaudible] expectations.
GT: But sometimes they have certain demands, aren’t they, that you don’t think are particularly, kind of, useful, and may actually be counter-productive but there’s a kind of fine balance between making them happy on one hand and then doing what’s best …
DF: Yes, exactly. And I think that APPG is going to be one of them because I … I already had that kind of conversation in the round at the weekend after I spoke to you, but I was told “no, you’ve got to get an APPG.” I think we might lose … we might lose the …
GT: Cause I think they’re just quite keen on it for the, kind of, kudos, aren’t they?
DF: Yeah …
GT: And of course not quite understanding what an APPG is.
DF: Yeah …
LL: I mean … if you’re on an APG meeting if … once a year you’re at on an APG meeting, you may get six people at it and two of them are itching to get off to another meeting, one of them’s asleep, and [inaudible] … it doesn’t do anything. It just … the only thing … reason to meet is to elect a … elect chairman.
DF: Yeah …
LL: I’m quite serious. It’s not, err …
DF: But can’t we make it do something if we … if the money is pumped into it can’t we make it do some things …
LL: Like?
DF: ... have some functions and ... you know, just get its profile, kind of raised up a bit and produce some reports ... ?
LL: So what kind of functions would you have?
DF: I don’t know. Something, erm ... something, kind of, err ... Fijian.
GT: Could have a drinks reception or something?
DF: Like I say, we could get ... maybe get some of these rugby players to attend and talk about their families back there ...
LL: You don’t need an APPG for that ...
DF: You don’t need it, but it kind of gives it a bit of ... erm, authentic kind of, erm ... veneer, doesn’t it?
GT: Yes, I think we’re in a slightly difficult position when our clients say “one thing I particularly want is the APPG” ... erm ... And you can kind of explain, “look, it might not be quite as useful as you envisage” but when people have got things in their head ... [inaudible] yes, exactly ...
DF: It’s a box we need to tick, basically, yeah ... We’d like it to work ... be functional for them. But if necessary we also just need to be able to tick that box and move on to some of the more ...
GT: Yes, exactly.
DF: Some of the more, erm ... challenging things you mentioned.
LL: Yeah ... is there a Fijian expatriates association?
DF: Erm ... what, you mean over here?
LL: Yeah ...
DF: A, kind of, diaspora thing ... is that what you mean?
LL: Yeah.
DF: Fijians over here. I think there is, yes. I’m trying to remember what it’s called.
LL: [Inaudible, can you find out where it is?]
DF: Yes. Yeah, absolutely, yeah.
GT: Yeah, we can probably find out about it.
LL: Can we run a reception for them and bring in the big rugby players.
DF: Yeah.
GT: Yes ...
LL: I’ll do that. That doesn’t need an APPG anyway.
GT: Are there nice places in the Lords presumably to hold receptions?
LL: Yeah ... some of these things ... depends where, what you want to run. We could run something ... I mean, if you’re going to run a meal you probably have to put your name down about a year in advance.
GT: Oh, really? Yes ...
LL: But this'll be just drinks—that sort of stuff.
GT: Yeah ... You could do something in one of the rooms ... or ... I don't know if there's a terrace or something ...

LL: That's easy enough. I'll get that. I run things regularly. Let me think ... I run things regularly ... once a month. I have a ... a discussion, I have 250 names on an email thing ... and we just invite people in. What did we have ... what did we do last week? What the hell did ... Oh yes, Islamic banking. We tried to explain what Islamic banking was.

GT: You tried to explain it to who?

LL: Anybody in our group who wanted to hear about it. Mostly old bankers.

GT: Oh, I see.

LL: Islamic banking and qualifying bank risk. Both of them we'll have to do again because ...

GT: They're unscheduled ...

LL: I have [inaudible]. You have any banks do you?

DF: No ... They are ... I mean, they are the pits. The absolute bloody pits. They don't even try ... A lot of them at least try and get it all wrong on public affairs, but the banks are so arrogant they don't. I mean, it really is awful. It's dreadful. I could write a book on it, in fact I probably will do. I'll write a book on the banks and they're just the lack of the ... there's a lot of money to be made for working for banks, but they're so bloody arrogant.

DF: Yeah. Sure.

GT: Yeah ... I can imagine that is their approach, isn't it?

LL: There's a bloody banking bill going through the Lords right now. And the point is ... there's no ... no bankers ever come to talk to us about it.

GT: Oh really?

LL: No ... and ...

GT: They haven't got very effective lobbyists then, have they?

LL: No, they haven't got any lobbyists.

GT: Really? I'm surprised, they've got so much money ... I thought they'd have been on the case.

DF: I think we're missing a trick here ...

LL: But what they ... but what they do is they say "oh well, we talk to George Osborne.” And I say, “well, to be honest George Osborne’s not us. It’s government. We’re not government, we’re Parliament.” I mean, what is the bloody point in talking to government? Because our job of Parliament is to get government to account. And all you want to do is talk to government, and all you're doing is doing what the civil service want you to do. But for ... for, I mean ... I think I'm so nasty to some of these guys who turned up last Friday, or Thursday, whatever it was we did [inaudible] on banking. [inaudible sentence.] Full of guys talking rubbish. As they say in Belfast don't start me ... now don't start with me!

GT: No, it sounds like we shouldn't.

DF: Can I say something else I've just remembered as well? Another thing that could ... could not, correct me if I'm wrong, the APPG be used for ... isn't
it possible to get people to come in and give talks? Like, Foreign Office guys
and whatever …

LL: I’ll do that.

DF: Yeah …

GT: You can do that as a member of the House of Lords without the APPG?

LL: Yeah … well, just what sort of people do you want?

DF: Well, I’m just thinking we could have …

GT: Civil servants, perhaps?

DF: Erm … I mean, it just connects people up. Because I think if we had a
certain type of APPG we could even have some of our sponsors there, and
then they could have, erm … more direct contact with the … the officials …
more traction with the issue, like FCO guys…

GT: Yeah. It’d be quite good for them to meet some civil servants, I’d imagine.

LL: It’s never good to meet them …

DF: I knew you were going to say that.

LL: It’s awful to meet civil servants. Yeah … I mean I can run that as much as
anybody else. That’s not … that’s not a thing just for AP … APPGs …

DF: No. Right.

LL: I think your client’s got to be educated as well.

DF: Mmm. Yes.

LL: Alright?

GT: About the APPG, or more generally?

LL: Everything. Yeah, everything. Everything. I think, err … and I think that’s
part of the process. Because what you’re doing is preparing this country for
Parliament in September of next year. OK?

DF: Mmm hmm.

LL: So it’s … there’s no point in the country being pregnant, giving birth and
nobody knows how to look after the new child.

DF: Yeah, exactly.

GT: No, absolutely, yeah.

LL: Alright? So you’ve got … so you can be … you can be high and mighty.
You’re helping. You’re doing your bit, you’re getting to think out … what
… what you’re not saying, except from the side of your mouth … is you’re
preparing Fiji this time to take to democracy. So they don’t have this hokey
cokey relationship with the Commonwealth … ok?

GT: Yeah …

DF: Yeah …

LL: So, therefore, what you may wish to do … is also talk to people in the
Commonwealth. And see what is … what is the problem? “What is your
problem with Fiji?”

GT: Yes, to engage like that …
DF: Well that’s right. I mean it’s not … This isn’t … we realise the answer to this, the solution is not just here in …

GT: Westminster.

DF: Over there …

LL: There’s a lot to [inaudible]. But the point is, because … as you know in politics … politics is a very unusual game. And politics is … you ask people’s advice, you don’t have to take their advice … But the point is it … it … it makes them feel good.

GT: Yeah …

LL: All this sort of stuff. So you’ve got to find … well what have the Australians got against them? What does this Australian … what does the Australian ambassador say? What does this one say? What does that one say? What does the other one say? We had a very interesting debate … Part of that system of debates. [Inaudible] we did fashion, tracking … we did pipelines. What is … the whole thing about the Philippines, we had the Philippines ambassador there because we’re doing the South China Sea.

DF: Oh, right, yes …

LL: And we had a debate on “what is a nation?”

GT: And what did you conclude?

LL: There’s no such …

GT: No, it’s a pretty broad topic, I guess.

LL: There is, I mean … there is no … in this, sort of, post-nationalist period there is no description of what is a nation. We do all … we do all sorts … we had a debate … a meeting about the follow-up to the Olympics. Super-computers was another one we had. Yes, we celebrated the … online or real-time banking … the first real-time bank anywhere in the world outside of the USA. The first bank ever to go real-time … so early in the real-time that it wasn’t even called online cause no-one’s ever heard the word “online”. It was called real-time. A real-time banking system. Mind you it was in Belfast. 1970 … An entire bank was online. [Inaudible.]

GT: Yeah …

LL: [Inaudible, every now and then?] we’ll do some historic thing. But we just … I think … there’s a lot demand from within the people that I have on this thing to … to keep on examining the city.

DF: Right …

GT: Who … who’s putting that demand on you? Your … one of your other …?

LL: No, no, no, no, no. I’ve got this … this has been … this has been practised for 13 years. Round about 13 years, right? So … we just started collecting email addresses of people who are interested so what happens is if you are on the email address you’ll get an invitation to something that I was running every once a month … sometimes even twice a month. It’s either a Tuesday, a Wednesday or a Thursday depending on things. Starts at six it’s over at eight so you’re next [inaudible].

GT: Yes …
And it’s in … it’s in … it’s in … it’s in the House of Lords. And so you get an email, you look down your email, you’re interested in it. You must return by email to say you’re coming for security purposes. Or you just forget about it. There’s no, sort of, membership thing. It’s just are you interested?

Yeah, you’re just invited.

So we get … we get … we get a hell of a lot of people … particularly from the City, actually. We get a lot of people coming in to talk. Just about every damn thing you can think of. You know, it’s a big networking thing.

Yes, it sounds like … actually, I think for our client that would certainly be quite useful, a kind of networking opportunity to get their face known.

Yeah, we’ll do that. Let’s get into it a wee bit. What you’re doing … what you are doing, whether you want to tell the client that or not … perhaps … is what you’re doing is laying the foundation for a new Fiji.

Yeah … it’s the practical considerations …

[Inaudible joke.]

Have you done this for other … I mean, obviously you talk about Azerbaijan. Are there other places that you helped out … ?

Not as much as this if, err. .. done some stuff with Libyans … it’s a very interesting case, actually. There’s a lot … there’s a lot of money in Libya.

You mean the current Libyan … ?

Post-Gaddafi Libya is very, very wealthy.

And the … and the Foreign Office are very keen to even give money to people who want to go out and do things out there.

What did they want done then? If you can tell me …

Well, you see, the point is this: the Brits went in and wrecked the bloody place. OK? And the Libyans want to thank them. They want to [inaudible].

As a thank you. Funny … politics is funny, isn’t it?

It is funny …

“That was bloody good work you did. You wrecked our bloody country … [inaudible].”

So a lot of British companies must be, kind of … gearing up to get involved.

But that’s a place where they don’t think out the box. What you want to do … we have a thing … what you want to do is to start something where … is there a university in Fiji?
GT: Actually, I think there is in the capital.
DF: In Suva, yeah … I think …
GT: Yeah, I’m not absolutely sure, but I think so.
DF: There’s some … yeah … I don’t know.
LL: You want to link that university with some of the institutes here.
GT: Mmm …
DF: Yes. Yeah.
LL: OK? You want to link it … who controls the universities?
DF: Yeah …
LL: What you want to do … I mean, I’m only thinking aloud here.
DF: Yes, yeah, yeah.
GT: No, it’s useful to chat things through.
LL: Yeah … what you want to do … have a ceremony here to give a little bit of … honorary degrees. Because a guy with an honorary degree is not going to go around shouting and roaring about the bloody country, is he? Because the only way he gets … the only way his status is built up is through the honorary degree … and therefore by definition he has to build up the country because that builds up his honorary degree …
DF: Yes. Yes …
GT: Yes …
LL: But if you … what’s your first name, sorry?
GT: Gemma.
LL: Gemma! J or a G?
GT: G.
LL: G, right. If you were Doctor Gemma …
GT: Oh, good …
LL: But the point is it’s only good as long as we know that your … your university’s not just a telephone kiosk …
DF: Yeah. Sure.
GT: Oh, absolutely. In India or something, yeah. Some of the problems here, wasn’t it? With immigration they kept saying those universities …
LL: What … what are the … what is the university known for? Known for?
GT: I don’t know. I need to look at … yes …
DF: Don’t know. I’m going to have to find out. I’m not even sure it exists. I’m going to have to check …
GT: Yeah, I have a feeling there’s a university in the capital but I’m not absolutely sure.
DF: Mmm … probably vocational kind of things.
LL: Let … coming back to this point again, obvi … there’s no budget that’s totally unending but the point is … you could send out a couple of
academics. To talk to the university, to look at ways of setting up ... See what we did ... what we did ... in Azerbaijan was set up an institute, which is still in the process of ... nothing ever happens in Azerbaijan very quickly ...

GT: I bet ...

LL: It’s the ... it’s the institute of 21st ... it’s the Azerbaijan institute of 21st century thinking.

DF: Right.

LL: Now, even as ... we as PR guys ... even to have that on the door—”The Azerbaijan Institute of 21st Century Thinking” ... putting “Azerbaijan” and “21st century thinking” in the same title.

GT: Yeah ... it sounds ... yes, it’s good, isn’t it?

LL: Even if the bloody thing never did anything.

DF: Yeah ...

GT: Yeah ...

LL: It’s ... it flows from the institute that we have in Belfast—the Francis Hutcheson Institute. Fellow called Francis Hutcheson, he was a Presbyterian clergyman. He is ... he’s regarded as the father of the Scottish Enlightenment.

GT: Oh, right ...

LL: OK? He had Adam Smith and David Hume in his class in Glasgow ... in the earlier part of the 18th century. But he taught people how to think out of the box. I don’t know whether you’re familiar with the concept of new light and old light?

DF: No ...

GT: No ... in terms of the Enlightenment?

LL: Yeah.

GT: No, I’m not actually.

LL: OK ... they’re very much, sort of, Presbyterian terms. Presbyterianism is very complicated but it’s not complicated in that it’s very straightforward because they don’t do all sorts of dogma and things ... the only thing about being a Presbyterian is that you’ve got to ... you got to ... you must do what you think is right. Therefore the first thing at any Presbyterian meeting is the split and who’s going to start it. There’s always a split. I mean ... in Northern Ireland there’s 17 different types of Presbyterians registered. OK? That’s the way it’s ... But some of them are new light and some of them are old light.

GT: Yes ...

LL: New light was invented by Francis Hutcheson. Old light ... old light, sort of pre the reform, is that old light will say: “that is a glass. I know that is a glass because it says in the bible that’s a glass.” Does exactly what it says in the bible ... New light will take that and say “that is a glass because I ... I can see through it. I’ve done experiments with it. I’ve tested it. I’ve worked on it. I’ve checked books on it. I’ve done a lot of ... That’s reason. I reason that to be a glass.” One is bible-based and one is reason-based.
GT: Yes …

LL: Now … Francis Hutcheson taught people to be reason based. As a result of that you can … you can then say in Scotland that brought on the Industrial Revolution. Because people … once you start people … religion … up to a period as you probably imagine … as you know was totally opposed to any new ideas because it couldn’t cope with new ideas.

GT: Yeah … [inaudible]

LL: Once you … once you got new idea in, you know … [inaudible] maybe we could make those!

GT: Yes, it’s a worrying trend, isn’t it? New ideas …

LL: We can make those, you know … we can do things with that.

DF: Yes … no, that’s a very interesting idea. About the universities …

LL: Get some sociologists to go out there and look to see what … what is required.

GT: Mmm …

DF: Mmm …

LL: I talk a lot. Sorry about that.

DF: No, no, no … I like it. You’re … kind of …

GT: No … can I just check a very practical thing? Sorry to go back to it, but erm … your retainer fee; do you then charge a day rate on top of that?

LL: No …

GT: Oh, right.

LL: What I’ll do … what’ I’ll do is … if you’re running me to death I’ll need to come back and say look mate [inaudible].

GT: Yes …

LL: Fair’s fair. But that’s all down to the value of the relationship between …

GT: Yes.

DF: Yeah.

GT: Absolutely … I just wanted to check that.

LL: It’s not in my interest to overdo anything. Co this is a bit like, err … you [inaudible, know or remember?] the Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy?

DF: Yep.

GT: Yes …

LL: [Inaudible sentence, talking about “experiment at the end of the world”.]

DF: That’s right. Yeah. Yeah.

LL: Alright? Well you could say that I like experimenting with [inaudible]. You know what I mean, you know what I mean …

GT: [Laughs.] Yes.

DF: Yes …

GT: We’ll have to see how it goes a little bit.
LL: I’m retired from the whole thing as long as I’m covered with a certain amount of way I’m not particularly …

GT: No, of course.

DF: How … how … how … I don’t know if it was down to you, particularly, but how … how was it possible to get so many parliamentarians on board on the Azerbaijan issue? Because, I mean you’ve been very successful on that. I mean, there’s a lot of …

LL: Well. .. it’s not all down to me …

OF: Yes …

LL: But it’s just that, err … Azerba … Parliament was run … the politics of that area was run by the Armenians. That’s the … the enemy, OK? That was quite clear up until about five years ago. And then we came along and, sort of, started to, err talk to people … take people out … it’s a slow process. It’s almost a tiering sort of thing. It’s not … it’s not … it’s producing little bits of information … you’re going to have to produce a regular little sheet of paper. What you … see, one of the reasons you want the expatriates’ organisation … is you can do an awful lot in the name of the expatriates.

DF: Yes …

LL: You have a reason for doing it. One thing you can do is produce a wee news, not a fact sheet. Let’s say once a month.

GT: Yes …

LL: You know … new jobs for some part of the [inaudible end to sentence]. All the things that have happened. I’m not saying I had anything to do with this, but they did win the European Song Contest.

DF: Yes. Yeah.

GT: Wow. There’s something we can go for.

LL: You’ve no idea how much that put them on the map …

GT: Oh, I bet! Yeah …

LL: People now know where Azerbaijan is.

GT: Yes. I think that is actually true.

LL: [Inaudible, speech covered by GT.] Eight or nine years ago in Northern Ireland we played Azerbaijan in a football match, and people’s … “what bus do you get? Where is this Azzebijan place? I’ve never heard of it…”

GT: No …

LL: But we’re playing them … we’re playing them again in October and going to take a lot of people out there including the First Minister and all sorts of stuff.

GT: Things like that are quite useful, aren’t they …? They’re …

LL: Well, it’s … it’s, look, erm … if … OK … Ulster … let’s take an example, I’ll just … Ulster’s got a very good rugby team which is quite likely to win a lot of stuff this year. Very good rugby team. Err … if you could … if … will there be any celebrations if … at the … after the elections?

DF: I’m sure.
GT: Mmm …
LL: What about a few visiting rugby teams [inaudible]?
DF: Yeah, well I was going to say, the rugby is definitely a route to go down. Because, I mean … it is the national sport.
GT: Yeah …
DF: They're obsessed with rugby. And people recognise Fijian …
LL: [Inaudible sentence.] You have to cover a little bit of money … some of the stuff … But once … listen, once you get … I just take my own province, OK? Ulster. You get them lot out, then you get the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and that’s … that’s great. Because they’re being seen to be … be part of the … you know then you get … you look to see who else do we get into … the bloody place, would the Aussies come over because [inaudible] …
GT: It’s almost, like, a soft way to do it … ?
LL: Massey! Massey! Massey! Massey! Massey! William Ferguson Massey. Did you hear of William Ferguson Massey?
GT: I haven’t. Should I have?
LL: He was … he was the Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1912 to 1925.
GT: Oh, I feel quite relieved now I didn’t know!
LL: He was … he was the, sort of, Maggie Thatcher figure. He was a guy of extreme vision. He had vision. One of his visions was that New Zealand should become a state of Australia, which is actually still a live debate. Alright? Massey … his name was William Ferguson Massey. He was actually an Ulsterman. Comes from a place called Limavady … OK … err. … let me think about this … he was … he was in the same mould of Ulster Presbyterians who thought differently. Thought big time differently. We’re got to try on Friday of next week … err … there is an inauguration of a new thing called the fra, err the … William Ferguson Massey Institute. OK? We’ve got some relation of his … She and I are the joint patrons of it and I’m doing the inaugural speech about Massey. He … he had this great … he had a great vision … it’s not a vision … it’s a vision that Fiji should have, it’s not of … it’s not a, sort of, nationalist vision where you’ve got a [inaudible] of people [inaudible few words], just vying for jobs. It was … it was … we were all citizens of the world.
LL: But he got a massive university. A massive university in … New Zealand …
GT: In New Zealand, yeah.
LL: You do … the first name, the first European name of the North Island was New Ulster [inaudible].
GT: Oh, really?
DF: Oh, really, I didn’t know that.
LL: So, anyway, that’s only in Ireland …
DF: Isn’t the Massey Ferguson a type of tractor?
LL: No, that’s a different thing. That’s …
DF: No, I gathered it was different. Yeah …
LL: That’s Ferguson … That’s Ferguson Massey.
DF: Yeah.
GT: Oh, right … Other way round …
DF: No, I realise. It’s the other way round, yeah. Just coincidence.
LL: In the Scottish diaspora, and this applies to me, in the Scottish diaspora you put your mother … if you’re a male you put your mother’s maiden name goes in as your middle name. OK?
DF: Right. Right.
LL: And your first name is your mother’s father’s Christian name.
GT: Oh …
LL: The second son, again you get the mother’s maiden name as your middle name … OK … but you get your mother’s father’s name as a first name. So that’s why if you’re ever dealing with Scots you’ll find a lot of them are called Elliot so and so … Ross so and so …
DF: Right. Right.
LL: ‘Cause this guy … by saying his name: William Ferguson Massey, you know immediately his [inaudible] was Ferguson.
GT: Oh, I see.
LL: ‘Cause that’s I mean … I’m John Dunn Laird. And … and the Scottish diaspora know immediately that my mother’s Dunn.
DF: Right.
GT: Yeah … Oh, that’s interesting. I didn’t know that.
LL: Yeah. That’s why … all you ever hear … that’s why you get a lot of Scottish people who’ve got this Scott so and so …
GT: Mmm …
LL: Ingram so and so …
GT: Yeah …
DF: Right.
LL: You know, Elliot so and so. [inaudible] so and so …
DF: Yes.
GT: Yeah, yeah …
LL: That’s … that’s how you get those names.
GT: Yes.
LL: That’s actually, you’ll find, if you look into … probably their second name …
GT: Yeah.
LL: That’s probably their mother’s maiden name.
GT: Yes, if you did their family tree you’d be able to see. Erm … quick question, something you mentioned earlier about the cost for setting up APPGs … could you give us an approximate idea?
LL: It ... it'll be very small.

GT: Oh really? OK ...

LL: You sound disappointed.

GT: No, I just got the impression from what you were saying earlier it was going to be quite, erm, substantial.

LL: No, I don't think so. Well, let's look at this way ... you're going to try ... you've got to get these people ... the first thing that I would do if you want me involved is to talk to Andrew Rosindell.

GT: Yes ...

LL: You know ... he'll get an erection when he hears a lot a bloody APPG about an island [inaudible end to sentence]. And see ... see what the thinking is about whether we should start one now ... Err ... you will get a lot of people who ... the opposition and the great unwashed and disinterested, will say, “look at that. There’s a south sea APPG, and look at these guys want to start one for Fiji. That’s just people trying to climb the ladder.”

DF: But would it help if you, kind of, put the word out that there’ll be a fact-finding trip out there? Presumably it will ...

LL: Well, yeah ... I think we’ve got to, err ... do something like that.

GT: Yes, it’d be the way to entice them a little bit.

DF: Yeah ...

LL: [Inaudible.] See, why I’m excited by William Ferguson Massey is it’s another place that we’ve got ... we’ve got links with. I mean, you know ... Northern Ireland ... it’s ... I’m just thinking in terms of that’s another ... you are the ... Fiji is going to ... it is going to be ... Fiji is going to box out of its mind. It’s ... it’s going to fight well above its weight.

GT: Yes ...

LL: OK. Because, what else has it got? ... It has ... it has ... it has ... got at least two communities vying with each other so there’s a little bit of experiment ... it has got problems with oncoming, erm ... global warming. And all sorts of stuff like that. It’s ... it’s at the back end of bloody nowhere. Yet it’s got a good tourist industry—it will have a good tourist industry ... sugar and all sorts of stuff. You know ... so you have got a laboratory. You have got ... now the white mice down there have got to work on this but that’s the laboratory. You've got so much to offer and so much to work with. Have you ever thought of ... now they aren’t twinned with any other island are they?

DF: No.

GT: No, I don’t think so.

LL: Let me think about ... why don’t you think of twinning with the Isle of Man?

GT: Do you think that would be helpful?

LL: Well, the Isle of Man’s in trouble. But they don’t know they’re in trouble but they are in trouble. I can’t ... again it’s another place where things
move terribly slowly and [inaudible murmur] ... but I do think they're in trouble because they're losing their [inaudible sentence].

GT: Well, yes ...

DF: Oh yes, yeah.

LL: And Isle of Man is ... is heavy ... err, it’s known ... it’s complacent. It’s err ... yes it’s complacent. It’s very complacent. [Inaudible.]

GT: Yes, what else are they going to do if they ... losing their ... oh, really?

LL: There’s very little crime.

GT: Oh, really?

LL: There’s very little crime. Very [inaudible] ... And, you know ... it’s ... it’s so self-satisfied. What they want to do ... I’ve often thought this myself. What they want to do is to link up with some not-as-well-developed island and offer their expertise. The oldest Parliament in the world. House of Keys. To the newest Parliament in the world.


GT: That’s an interesting thought, yeah.

LL: Alright? Now you’ll have a job talking to the bloody islanders. Cause they [inaudible] they live in a wee world of their own.

GT: Yes.

DF: Yes ...

LL: I, I mean I told these ... I ... I know a number of the Keys and this sort of stuff [inaudible sentence]. It’s almost like ... it’s too hard to try and change. They’re run by the civil servants.

DF: Is your interest there just because you’ve got a place there or are you actually ...

LL: No, I’ve always been interested ... it’s only about 20 minutes away from Belfast.

DF: Yeah. Sure.

GT: Yes. [inaudible] ... always interested in the Isle of Man. Just like the Isle of Man.

DF: Yeah, I’ve never been. Always going to go and watch the race there, you know, then.

LL: I don’t know ...

DF: Dangerous sport, just watching it, though. I’m sure.

GT: Oh, God ...

DF: People get ... spectators get killed.

LL: I’m against ...

GT: Oh, that does not sound good.

LL: [inaudible] including golf!

GT: Are you against golf?

LL: It’s a blood sport.
DF: Yes …
LL: It’s the only one where you lose your balls.
DF: [Laughs.]
GT: [Laughs.]
LL: Now you fell for that, now … sorry about that, but you fell … [inaudible]
LL: OK, well look …
GT: Alright …
DF: OK. Yeah, that’s been very helpful indeed.
GT: Yeah. Thanks so much for your time. That was really useful.
DF: Extremely, yeah, and very amusing.
LL: It’s meant to be serious! This is serious business!
DF: Yes, no it is serious. Yes.
GT: Oh, there’s so much serious stuff, isn’t there?
DF: Let me give you a card as well … There we go. That’s mine.
GT: Thank you very much.
DF: Thank you very much. Thank you.
LL: You’re not from the Isle of Man, then …
DF: No, I’m not from the Isle of Man.
GT: That’ll be good if he was …
LL: Taylor!
GT: Yes …
LL: What’s the origin of Taylor?
GT: Don’t know, actually.
DF: It’s a professional name, isn’t it? The Taylors?
LL: You can take that view, but you can also take the views of [inaudible] me. Come from not very far from me. I come from Otterburn 400 … in 1610 … Taylors … there’s a large lot of Taylors at Newcastle … in fact they built Newcastle. The new castle. Newcastle was built to get the Taylors out, Taylors, Wilsons and all those people.
GT: Built to keep us out …
LL: Yeah … cause you … but you’re a great people for rape and pillage. Now …
GT: Great. [Laughs.]
DF: Just so you know …
LL: Yeah … we’ve got them off the bloody pillage but … you can either regard yourself as a Border Reiver … I mean is Taylor … it’s not a married name, is it?
CN: No.
LL: Right.
CN: No, it’s my family name.
LL: Right. It depends … there are Taylors who fit into that and they come from just below Newcastle. Just slightly below Newcastle. Just slightly south … south-west of Newcastle. That’s where they come from. Look up the maps.
CN: Yeah …
LL: 1610.
CN: No. No-one in my family has done their whole family tree.
LL: Northern Ireland is full … sorry for going back … Northern Ireland is full of Taylors because it’s … it’s what’s known as a plantation name. OK, it’s a plantation … we were, we were … we were enjoying our tea one day in 1610 and King James people came and moved us over to Ulster. Now, yeah … it’s not nice …
CN: No … Pretty mean.
LL: Just sitting there watching Coronation Street and …
CN: Minding your own business …
LL: Minding your own business and they frigging take you out. Because we had a great time there for 350 years.
CN: Yeah …
LL: Rape and pillage and all that …
DF: [Laughs.]
CN: Goodness …
LL: Hard to beat, isn’t it?
CN: Well, exactly. Those were the days, huh?
DF: [Laughs] on that note … Yeah.
CN: Alright.
DF: Well, that’s been extremely helpful. Really, genuinely. Erm … thank you very much for popping over. Are you going back over that way?
LL: Yeah …
DF: To the House, yeah? Late … a late night ahead beckons …
CN: Yes, have you got to work till ten?
LL: [Responds inaudibly about late nights. Tells CN and DF about his irregular heartbeat while putting on coat.]
CN: Pleasure to meet you.
DF: Yes, I’ll come out with you.
CN: Have a good afternoon.
CN: Take care.
DF: To the left …
Appendix I: transcript of telephone call between undercover BBC reporter and Lord Laird, 10 May 2013

LL: Hello
DF: Hello. Is that Lord Laird?
LL: Yes
DF: It’s Daniel Mann here.
LL: Oh, Daniel, how’s it going?
DF: Have you been trying to reach me? Yeah, I had a message yesterday, sorry I haven’t got back to you before that, but I had a message saying you’ve been trying to reach me for some time, which is news to me, so I’m sorry if I’ve missed other messages.
LL: Don’t worry about that, don’t worry. I’m just checking to see how things are going?
DF: Yeah, well it’s um, they’re going okay, but basically the reason I haven’t been in touch, and that is remiss of me, is because the client got into some confusion, obviously the client is more than one person, I know you are probably well experienced in what that involves.
LL: Oh, God, yes, yes yes.
DF: So in terms of the consultancies, there’s a delegation coming over towards the end of this month from Fiji and I am assured that there will be clarity at that point as to how many people we can take on because, to be honest with you, it’s been driving me nuts actually.
LL: It’s typical isn’t it?
DF: It’s not helped by the distances and the time, the time lag involved either.
LL: Oh, God, yes, yes yes.
DF: But are you, are you still interested?
LL: Yeah, no, I’m still interested. I do have a sort of I think I mentioned to you, a time constraint. If we can work out, I would be very happy to be of help but I can’t be sort of day to day hands on. I can be …
DF: No, I realise that yes, that’s fine.
LL: I would be, I think it’s quite interesting and I like that sort of stuff to be quite blunt about it. What, I’m off going to Azerbaijan on the 28th of May and back about the 4th of June.
DF: Right
LL: It’s not during that period that they’re over? I mean do you want to …
DF: No, it’s before then, it’s before the 28th definitely. The date I’ve got at the moment, they’re coming over is the 18th, although on previous experience that’s liable to possibly change at the last minute but I’m told it’s the 18th.
LL: Oh, God, they must be like the Azerbaijani then, you can never, [inaudible].
DF: Yes, it sounds like it
LL: [Inaudible.] But do you want to bring them along to the Palace of Westminster for a drink or something like that, would that be helpful.

DF: Sorry, say that again?

LL: Do you want to bring them into the Palace of Westminster for a drink or a cup of tea, would that be helpful?

DF: Yes, well that would be great. That would be great. So you’re around until the 28th did you say?

LL: Oh yeah, no bother [inaudible].

DF: So, the thing is, are you around during the recess as well, because it’s the recess from the 21st isn’t it?

LL: Is it not recess the following week?

DF: Yeah, but I think it’s the recess from the 21st so I’m just asking if you’re still around during the recess …

LL: I can be, hold on … but the recess is the following week, is it not?

DF: Oh, I thought it was from the 21st. 21st to the 3rd or something, I thought it was. I’ll have to double check that.

LL: Er, well I hope you’ve got it wrong, I think you may have got it wrong. Look, I can’t be definitive, I don’t have my diary here but er, look, I’ll be about. We’ll work something out, I’m around the 18th, 19th, and all that sort of week.

DF: Right, okay fine. Let me come back to you I’ll sort that out in case I’ve got that wrong as well. I’ll give you the firm dates. But if you can fix something like that it’d be great, yeah. Definitely. Definitely.

LL: You see at Whit we only get one week, I don’t know why we’d get two.

DF: Sorry, say that again, sorry there’s a lot of traffic here.

LL: At Whit, at Whit, we get one week, I’ve never known them to give us two.

DF: Oh right, yes.

LL: Because they’ve just got a new, obviously a Queen’s Speech of stuff to get through …

DF: Actually I tell you what I’m thinking of …

LL: I can’t be, I can’t be definitive but I’ve a feeling you’re wrong.

DF: Yeah, I’m thinking of the Commons recess anyway and I think the Lords might be slightly different date anyway.

LL: No, it is a different date, oh yeah, it’s not the same date at all.

DF: No, well that’s what I’m thinking, I’m thinking of the Commons recess, sorry yeah.

LL: Yeah, the Commons are only part-timers anyway, for God’s sake they’re not bloody worth the thing, bloody useless you know. I mean, I’m all for putting down a bill in the Lords to get rid of the Commons and abolish the Commons and just go on without them, you know.

[Laughs.]
But there you go. There we go. Anyway, keep in contact, listen, I just wanted to check how things were going, that’s all.

Yeah, I appreciate the call, thanks very much, speak to you again Lord Laird.

Bye bye.

Bye bye.

Appendix J: Letter from Snapper TV to Lord Laird, 25 May 2013

I am the managing director of a television company called Snapper TV, which is making a programme for BBC 1 Panorama about the extent of political lobbying in Parliament.

The programme is being made against a general but continuing background of concern about the impact of lobbyists at Westminster. Following well-publicised criticisms of lobbying while in opposition, the Prime Minister subsequently commissioned a consultation process on lobbying. Among other things this exercise examined the feasibility of introducing a limited register of lobbyists, but has not yet resulted in legislative proposals.

In this context, we are examining the extent to which All Party Parliamentary Groups can provide outside entities such as lobbyists with opportunities to exert undue influence on the Parliamentary process.

A Working Party for the Speakers of both Houses reported in June 2012 and voiced concerns about the way in which such groups have proliferated and the ways in which they operate. The impact of the report remains unclear with key recommendations not being enacted e.g. disallowing associate APPG groups, reducing the number of APPGS and ensuring greater transparency of proceedings.

Other critics have voiced concern at the way in which the APPG system, primarily intended to cater for and foster the interests of Parliamentarians in particular subjects, can become vehicles for lobbyists. Some appear to have been formed at the behest of outside interests, against the spirit of the Speakers’ report, which urged parliamentarians involved in APPGS to take fuller control of them.

Criticism has also come from political observers such Alistair Graham, the former chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and Parliamentarians themselves, who have said that reform of the APPG system is of vital importance.

In researching this programme we made an extensive examination of Parliamentary records including the Register of Interests, Parliamentary Questions, APPG reports, and many other relevant public and media sources.

We wished to look at the extent to which outside consultancy payments were apparently connected to the APPG system, to MPs and Peers, the purpose of any such payments and the extent to which they may have created conflicts of interest.

Since July 2010 you have been the paid chairman of the advisory board to The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS). You also sit on the APPG for Azerbaijan. TEAS is run by the son of an Azerbaijani minister and has an agenda which is highly sympathetic to the Aliyev regime. Since being a paid consultant to TEAS you have put down a question in Parliament, in April 2011, which stated:
“To ask Her Majesty’s Government whether they sent condolences to the Government of Azerbaijan to mark the anniversary of the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijan on 31 March.”

Later, in November, 2012, you obtained a grand committee debate about Azerbaijan during which you referred to Aliyev as ‘genuinely popular, and people are optimistic about the future of the country.’ You went on to urge Britain to play a more active role in dealing with Azerbaijani refugees from the Nagorno Karabakh dispute and in helping to resolve the conflict itself. You also called for a British government cabinet minister to visit Azerbaijan to help foster trade and because ‘such a high-level visit would be most meaningful to the Azerbaijan Government and people.’

Notwithstanding the fact that you declared your interest (as chairman of the advisory board to TEAS) on these occasions, both actions raise concerns over your compliance with paid advocacy rule in the Code of Conduct for members of the House of Lords. This states that members “must not act as a paid advocate in any proceeding of the House; that is to say, he or she must not seek by parliamentary means to confer exclusive benefit on an outside body or person from which he or she receives payment or reward.” It is Azerbaijan and TEAS who would have benefited from the measures you advocated in your speech, particularly if and when the UK intervened more strongly in the Nagorno Karabakh dispute, something that is at the forefront of TEAS’s campaigning.

As a result of the above research, you were contacted by phone on March 7 2013 by a representative of the Panorama team calling himself Daniel Mann. He told you that he was a political lobbyist, working for a communications company called Alistair Andrews Communications. He asked if you were interested in paid consultancy work in connection with his client the Society of Friends of Fiji, SOFOF. Neither of the above organisations exists.

He told you that SOFOF was a conglomeration of Fijian business interests, which was campaigning for the return of Fiji to the Commonwealth.

You met with Mr Mann, not his real name, and a reporter calling herself Gemma Taylor, not her real name, on March 13.

As well as alluding to the above points, our documentary may also allege that you:

- Said that you were prepared to work for Alistair Andrews on behalf of its ‘Fijian client’ and suggested your retainer fee would be at least £2,000 per month.

- Offered in return for payment to carry out Parliamentary duties, which could include starting an APPG for Fiji (“… if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it.”) and suggested approaching at least one MP (Andrew Rosindell) with a view to affecting this.

- Suggested that questions could be placed on behalf of the Fijian Client through other Members of Parliament. Further, you stated that this might be achieved through offering the “bribe” of a trip to Fiji. On any such trip, you urged that the Fijian Client should show MPs and Peers the “best bloody time they’ve ever had”, implying that the politicians would thereby be more favourable to the client.

- Would disguise your role in these activities not only by steering the questions through third parties but also by placing the questions in non-specific debates which would have the further benefit that “the anti
people were not prepared” or which could “get a Minister to make a fluff.”

- When asked if you could place an early day motion you indicated that you could place ‘a similar thing in the Lords’ and added that you could “raise whatever we want.”

- Suggested you could ‘raise the issue’ of a Foreign Office minister visiting Fiji after it was suggested by ‘Mann’ and ‘Taylor’ that this would be beneficial to their client.

- In respect to your work for TEAS, and the fact that TEAS has subsidised trips to Azerbaijan for members of the APPG for Azerbaijan, you said that there is ‘a hell of a balance to be got at between being seen to manipulate the APPG and manipulating the APPG.’ This, of course, suggests that you regard these parliamentary committees as entities open to manipulation by outside entities as long as such manipulation is kept discreet.

In respect of the above matters, it appears that you have breached, or have shown yourself willing to breach, a number of Parliamentary rules including:

- The Code of Conduct which states: “Members are required under paragraph 7 of the Code to base their actions on consideration of the public interest. Acceptance of financial inducement as an incentive or reward for exercising parliamentary influence would necessarily contravene this principle”.

- Paragraph 8(c) of the Code states that Members “must never accept or agree to accept any financial inducement as an incentive or reward for exercising parliamentary influence”.

- Paragraph 8(d) of the Code describes the specific application of the principles described in paragraphs 7 and 8(c): Members “must not seek to profit from membership of the House by accepting or agreeing to accept payment or other incentive or reward in return for providing parliamentary advice or services”.

- The Code goes on to say that: “The prohibition from accepting payment in return for parliamentary advice means that Members may not act as paid parliamentary consultants, advising outside organisations or persons on process, for example how they may lobby or otherwise influence the work of Parliament. The following is not parliamentary advice: advice on public policy and current affairs; advice in general terms about how Parliament works; and media appearances, journalism, books, public lectures and speeches.” Procuring other members of Parliament to ask questions would breach this aspect of the Code.

- The Code also states: “The prohibition from accepting payment in return for parliamentary services means that Members may not, in return for payment or other incentive or reward, assist outside organisations or persons in influencing Parliament. This includes: seeking by means of participation in proceedings of the House to confer exclusive benefit upon the organisation (the ‘no paid advocacy rule’); or making use of their position to arrange meetings with a view to any person lobbying Members of either House, ministers or officials. A Member may never provide parliamentary services in return for payment or other incentive or
reward.” Your offer to approach other MPs to ask questions may also breach this aspect of the Code.

We would request that should you wish to respond to the matters that we have highlighted in this letter that you do so with the next 5 days.

Appendix K: Submission from Lord Laird to the Commissioner, 7 October 2013

Background

In 1999 I gave up a financially secure and rewarding position to accept an appointment to the House of Lords. As a former Northern Ireland Member of Parliament, I have always had an interest in politics and, with what I considered ‘good communication’ skills, I felt that I could contribute and so support my community.

I arranged my family life in such a fashion that I was away from home most of the working days and only in Belfast at weekends.

I made a commitment at that stage to be a working Peer and to attend as much as possible. In my opinion, to make an impression on any Institution you must attend well over 80% of the time. My attendance record is in the upper 90s(%) except when unwell.

I spent the first year making friends and learning how and why things happened. It became clear to me that the outside world knew little about the work of the Lords and how it affected their lives. People would feel overawed when they considered a visit to the House, or in some cases, just meeting a Peer.

In my view, that was wrong and helped neither the House of Lords nor the taxpayer. I resolved to try to do my small part in making the House more interesting and accessible. Steps that I took included:

- I never refused any valid request for advice or help in seeking access to the building or information about it.
- If there was any suggestion of investment or employment for the UK and, in particular, Northern Ireland, I became very active. Anything that I could do, anywhere, I did at my own expense to facilitate potential investors. On many occasions I sponsored functions, large and small, for Invest Northern Ireland. Even during my periods of heart-related ill health and much to my family’s concern, I took on related tasks.
- On many occasions I supported and helped local business folk with access to the ‘City,’ business in general and to other countries.
- While new in Westminster, I became involved in a group of former Northern Ireland residents who worked in London. Many were determined to take their skills back to the Province but needed support, encouragement and advice. This I was delighted to offer.

Before many years the scope of this group widened and so did its nature. Anyone could be involved by supplying an email address. A group of friends and I started to run discussion groups in any available committee room on a free Tuesday or Wednesday. Timing is 6.00 to 8.00 sharp.
These discussions could be on any topic and only depended on the availability of a knowledgeable speaker. During 2012 topics included:

- British fashion
- English wine
- Super computers
- What is a nation?
- Switzerland’s financial system
- The economic success of the Olympic games
- The South China Sea area
- Iraq’s business development
- The Doomsday Book
- The politics of oil and gas pipelines.

Attendance varied from 50 to 95. I went out of my way to make all feel at home. I always tried to speak to each guest on a one-to-one basis: “this is your Parliament, do not be afraid to visit it or contact any Member,” I would point out. I was there to help anyone.

I never sought, or even considered seeking, payment for these events.

- I would be asked by groups such as school ex pupils’ associations, Chambers of Commerce, church groups, bands from Northern Ireland who were to perform in the Lord Mayor’s parade, to host a dinner. This I was always delighted to do at any time. I never was paid by any group for such support.

- Over the years, when approached, I would take on cases of what I considered to be real maladministration for individuals or groups. This practice has become more frequent.

- I would run charity-related events whose object was to make their ‘cause’ better known. As a result of my work, Co-operation Ireland obtained almost £30,000 in donations over the early years. Others included several which helped Republic of Ireland-based historic sites.

- I always make a point of inviting anyone from Northern Ireland to visit the Lords, where I would entertain them.

- My friends and I, every two years, run a specially designed lunch called “Food for Thought”. This is my public relations idea to use the Lords facilities for the common good. We would invite about sixty guests to a lunch by the means of a fancy invitation from me. When the guests arrived, at the welcoming stage, I would, with drama, ask one of the guests to select an envelope from two available. When selected I announced that at each place setting was a coloured card. Only those with the appropriate colour would be given the four course silver service lunch including wine. The others would only be served a small bowl of rice and a glass of tap water.

The cards had been allocated alternately, ie blue, red, blue, red and so on. The staff loved this ‘different’ function and came from many departments just to see it underway. The effect was at once and was magic. As in life
and as in a lottery, half those at the tables could eat all they wanted, watched on both sides and directly by others on rice and water. Each group coped in a different way. At the end I then led a discussion, asking:

1. Which colour was the most embarrassed—those with food or those with little?
2. How did it feel?
3. What can we do in rich countries to redress the situation?

My wife is a great supporter and helper on this project. The guests loved it. It opened minds, graphically outlined one of the major problems of our world. Many got involved in longer term work as a result.

Importantly, no matter what colour, everyone seemed to enjoy the event. It was very different.

Many of those guests returned home and told their friends that they went for lunch to the Lords and got rice and tap water and they enjoyed it. A great talking point was created.

These events we funded from our own and friends’ funds and, in many cases ourselves only.

- I have spent much time visiting all forms of groups, mostly in Northern Ireland, talking about the Lords, who we are and what we do.

These activities take up a large part of my time. They also have required me to fund them in some way. I have never been paid for such events, not even travel expenses. I never asked for, or expected, any reward except that of doing what I thought was for the good of the general community.

**General response to both incidents**

Currently I suffer from two major medical problems.

- Severe heart problems.

I had a heart attack in 2007 which has caused many problems since. My medical history in this respect is attached. Stress and over-work have a devastating effect on me. I must avoid stress at all costs.

- Depression.

I have suffered from depression all my life. At very difficult times I required treatment. All of the early period is noted in a book which I wrote and which was published in 2010 (*A Struggle to be Heard*). I have taken further medical treatment since then. Again, medical history for my personality and background is attached. I am currently under treatment for the setback caused by the scams and associated activity earlier this year.

Adding these medical factors to my particular background and the following picture emerges.

- As I was small and bullied when under 11 years old, I learnt to use humour as a ‘tool’ to get out of nasty situations. Mostly the jokes were on me. To this day I try to use as much humour as I can to ease stress and make an impression on those with whom I am talking. On many occasions, without pausing to consider the consequences fully, I try to be funny to at least ease my stress.
This proves such a constant relief for me that it’s practically become habitual. I am sure that others mistakenly think that it is a natural facet of my personality.

- From an early age I suffered low self esteem. In class, the scouts or elsewhere, I avoided tasks at all costs. I assumed that I could not complete them without criticism. Criticism seemed to be directed to me all the time and so I felt incapable of being like anyone else. Humour was to be my crutch.

- The stress that I suffer causes fear, panic, loss of concentration and, worst of all, worry about a heart attack or my defibrillator going off. The latter two are dramatic, very painful and frightening. My consultant, for example, will not let me use the underground in London because of stress.

- I have an over-developed desire to please. I always want to help by providing information and entertainment.

- It would take very little research around the Lords to discover my condition. I am noted by the Clerk of Parliament’s Office as ‘handicapped and with special needs’, and thus get extra support.

So, I approached both interviews in order to help. In the BBC case I thought that I was dealing with two PR people and so the discussion could be at a professional level including banter. In the initial phase of conversation they claimed to be “a strategic communications company, I know you are in the same line of business” (phone conversation 7/3/13). I would normally take a friend or member of the family for such meetings but did not on the first (BBC) one.

I thought that I was discussing a PR campaign as can be noted from my desire to ‘create a climate’ of opinion favourable to Fiji. I take a different view from Parliamentary lobbyists who target ministers etc … with information. While the latter can be necessary, the main and most successful tactic is to force HMG to a course of action because of the general climate of opinion. As a visiting professor this is the area about which I often lectured.

I consider that I have much experience in the development of climates of opinion. In the Fiji case I listed, off the top of my head, a number of ways that a positive climate of opinion could be developed.

There were a number of weeks between my discussions with the BBC reporters in which nothing happened. I think they said they would get back to me. I forgot all about the case until I came across a business card. I tried to remember what it was about. I contacted the number and in time the male reporter phoned me back. Perhaps, and unfortunately, this reminded them of my existence.

It must be remembered that, as evidenced in the transcript (page 38), I said I would not get involved in anything not allowed by the rules. And I wanted the tasks outlined before any agreement on a strategic communications campaign, as evidenced in the transcript of the phone call of 7 March, 12.40.

It is important to note that at no time did I agree to undertake any incorrect tasks. In fact, I said I would not act outside the code (transcript pages 37 & 38).

I thought that I was dealing with fellow professionals, thus talking their language and sharing an industry-understood sense of humour. The incident, for example, where I said that I would deny using the word ‘bribe’ was an attempt at humour with another ‘PR person’.
In the case of the Sunday Times entrapment, the same background applied. However, this time I brought a friend with me, Kevin Cahill. As it happens, Kevin Cahill is a former Sunday Times Insight Journalist.

At no time did I agree to undertake any tasks, rather, I wanted to get away to ‘consider the matter’ and to produce a written document to be agreed by all. This is the way PR professionals would act, and only this way.

I did not agree to any fee as already explained. Directly following the lunch Kevin Cahill and I conferred. Both of us had realised that we were the subject of some sort of ‘scam’. I went straight to my apartment to rest and thus relieve a very sore head that I had during the lunch (sign of stress) KC went to Westminster to report the whole affair to Black Rod’s Office. The following day we let the Sunday Times people know that we knew it was a scam!

The Public Relations Profession

I earned my living from providing public relations advice and activity for over thirty years. For twenty six of those years I owned and ran an agency in Belfast which had worldwide connections. I started the agency in March 1976 and sold it in 2002. At one stage I employed nineteen staff. Always under my direction, the Agency carried out considerable volumes of work in mainland UK, Europe and in Washington DC.

The discussions which I had with both sets of scammers, who presented themselves as fellow PR professionals, were understood by me to be early ‘get to know’ meetings. It would have been totally unprofessional and contrary to my practice, to agree to be a consultant on a campaign without considerably more detailed understanding of the tasks along with funding arrangements involved.

As a senior and, I understand, well respected member of the profession (Visiting Professor in Communications, Fellow of the Chartered Institute of PR and awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Chartered Institute) who has been involved in very many such initial contacts, it would be inconceivable to consider the meetings as anything other than introductory. If there was to be an agreement, it would be in detailed written form defining the exact nature of the consultative role and what were the targets outlined in detail against a timetable. There would also be agreement for ongoing review and assessments. Both sides must know in written detail what is going to happen, when, how and why. If involved, funding would be considered and documented in detail. A ‘chain of command’ would be set up.

In both cases the scammers presented themselves as fellow public relations professionals. They all had business cards and websites. All looked impressive. Both claimed to be looking for a consultant. Both acknowledged that I was in the same profession as they.

I have had many such professional meetings in my career—discussing the needs of a client with those who have evidence that they are in the same business. Similar to all professionals there are understood concepts of professional confidentiality. How else could we do trade?

I have been involved with many major PR led campaigns with clearly required information and actions being considered in confidence. In many cases the meeting included legal or other experts to advise us to make sure we were inside the appropriate rules, or the law. Sometimes these meetings included the police, and may take place following the PR professional’s discussion.
‘Daniel Mann’ introduced himself as an employee of a strategic communications company in the same line of business as myself. My involvement in PR was raised during the phone conversation and from the outset of the meeting. Reference was made to my work with the European Azerbaijan Society. In this role I have used my insight gained from being involved in both politics in a divided society (Northern Ireland) and PR to help the Society see itself as others see them so that they can communicate more effectively. I expected that the consultancy role ‘Mann’ and ‘Taylor’ wished to discuss would be similar.

At the meeting we had what I thought, a stimulating conversation on how a conglomeration of business Interests could communicate in the UK with a view to supporting the return of Fiji to the Commonwealth. This included the following.

- The formation of a Fijian Interest Group, to include ex-patriots in the UK, that would open up the communication channels to raise awareness and understanding about Fiji. Information about Fiji is very limited in the UK and I used my own limited awareness of Fiji as an example.
- The helpfulness of establishing new tourism and business links to the country.
- Creating sporting links between clubs in UK regions and those in Fiji, with particular reference to rugby.
- The development of more links with New Zealand, in particular within the academic world.
- General advice about how information on Fiji could be brought to the attention of Parliamentarians.
- Creating an image of Fiji as an island of answers to modern difficulties.

In my understanding of the Code of Conduct and its accompanying guidance it is acceptable for me to provide public relations advice for a fee (hence the discussion of the £2,000 retainer) but not to provide parliamentary advice. Advice in general terms about how Parliament works is not deemed to be parliamentary advice.

‘Mann’ and ‘Taylor’ were particularly interested in establishing an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Fiji. I consider this to be of limited use but they insisted their client was keen. I explained how APPGs work (for example the educational trip to Fiji (p9)), which I regard as general advice. My statement that ‘the point is … the … if the … if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it’ (p7) was said in the context that we would be working together for the client—hence the use of the word ‘we’—and of course it is possible to get an APPG, but I wouldn’t have set up the APPG and, in my view, it would not be worthwhile setting up an APPG.

It was ‘Mann’ who suggested Andrew Rosindell to set up the APPG (phone conversation, 7 March, and p5 of the transcript). I didn’t offer to approach Andrew Rosindell.

The Code does not forbid Parliamentarians, including members of APPGs from taking trips paid for by a third party. Presumably such trips are acceptable because they are informative and may influence Parliamentarians to make an assessment different from that which they might otherwise have made. It would therefore not be desirable to curtail Parliamentarians’ ability to act on their new understanding.
However, it could be argued that in so doing (ie. taking a trip and subsequently being influenced by the trip), Parliamentarians appear to expose themselves to the possibility of being accused of accepting a bribe. Since it is surely not the intention that the Code should leave Parliamentarians exposed to accusations of giving or taking a bribe it must be assumed that the actions of offering or taking a trip is not considered to be giving or taking a bribe.

In my enthusiasm for the subject I clarified the following in the meeting.

- APPGs can be established and there is a process that has to be followed in order to set them up (p7).
- APPGs can produce reports but they are independent committees and the members will form their own opinions (p8).
- Generally, APPGs that are about specific countries will visit the country as this gives members a better insight into the country (p9).
- MPs that are interested in an issue will take every opportunity to raise that issue and it is advisable to persuade a broad cross section of MPs and Peers of a case (p7, 28, 31, 35).
- Peers can run receptions and I have run discussions on a wide range of issues (p41, 42 & 46). It’s possible to invite anyone to be a guest speaker, including Foreign Office staff as it would be for them to decide whether it is appropriate for them to speak at the event.

I was not paid for this advice; and

I would not have signed a contract or made an agreement to provide parliamentary advice or services in return for payment or benefit. I am aware that the medication I am on because of my heart condition makes my thinking slower than before. I always ensure that I take time to consider and seek advice of trusted associates before I take on anything. This level of scrutiny would have been applied to any contract or agreement that would have been put forward by ‘Mann’ and ‘Taylor’.

I stated that I would not break the rules (p37 and 38) and I stated that my interest in taking on the role was dependent on the level (p34) by which I meant what their actual requirements would be. I am very clear on what actions are consistent with my understanding of the Code of Conduct and its accompanying guidance and what is not. I have tried to comply with the undertakings I have made in signing up to the Code of Conduct, and continue to do so.

**Sunday Times**

On 14 May 2013, I received an email from ‘James Lloyd’ on behalf of ‘Coulton & Goldie Global’. ‘Lloyd’ asked if I was interested in undertaking consultancy work. I was not interested in responding to the email and had forgotten about it when he phoned me a few days later. He wanted to meet me the next day but I was returning to Belfast so, following some coaxing, I agreed to meet the following Monday. I was approached because of they were seeking a group of expert consultants, which I took to mean my public relations experience. A ‘generous remuneration package’ was mentioned but it was unclear whether their intention was for the consultancy to relate to public relations, which in my view could be acceptable under the Code of Conduct (depending on the specifics) or political advocacy, which would not be acceptable. (See separate note on phone call.)
I did have some doubts about the authenticity of the company but, by nature, I tend towards ‘keeping an open mind’ and because they had made the effort to get in touch and seemed so keen to meet me I met ‘Lloyd’ and his colleagues on 20 May to hear what they had to say. It seemed possible that I could assist them either in a paid capacity as a public relations consultant or with free public affairs advice.

In general and on a point of principle, I meet with as many of the people who ask to meet me as I can because I believe that it is an intrinsic part of the role of a peer to be accessible and to help individuals and interest groups access Parliament.

I do not get paid to meet these individuals and groups so, in my understanding of the Code, it is acceptable for me to give them an insight into how Parliament works.

In this case, the people I met were insistent that they wanted to pay me. As I made clear in the meeting, I would be willing to undertake a public relations role for a consideration as long as it would be in keeping with my obligations under the Code but I would not be involved in anything that is inappropriate or unacceptable.

I did not agree to act as a paid advocate in any proceedings of the House nor did I accept payment or other incentive or reward in return for providing parliamentary advice or services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract from the Sunday Times</th>
<th>JL comment</th>
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<td>Laird was also happy to mastermind a parliamentary lobbying campaign—’for a MINOR consideration’ … told the reporters: ‘All you’re simply doing, really, is using the services of a public relations guy who happens to be in the Lords. It’s like going to a dentist who happens to be in the Lords.’</td>
<td>The minor consideration was for the PR advice.</td>
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<td>‘We can run debates, we can take part in debates … put down amendments in debates, putting down questions or writing to the minister.’ Laird said he would not ‘cross the line’ into what he called ‘the bad area’ and emphasised that he would declare the payment the reporters were offering. But he said that was a ‘soft underbelly’ that he could exploit. ‘What you do is dear, whatever it is, Fred or whatever minister, I want to discuss such and such, I do have an interest in this topic. That’s all you have to say.’</td>
<td>Description of the role of a peer. Description of how the system works.</td>
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<td>Two days later the warning appeared to have trickled through to Laird. His assistant, Kevin Cahill, who had accompanied him to the lunch earlier that week, emailed the reporters fake company to accuse them of attempting to bribe Parliamentarians. He said he and Laird knew he was being set up all along and had met the reporters to ‘obtain formal evidence of what you were up to—and a free lunch’.</td>
<td>‘Free lunch’ comment is Kevin’s, not a reflection of how I regarded the meeting.</td>
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Laird warned the reporters that they would have to throw money at the group to tempt Parliamentarians to join with the promise of free trips abroad. He said he was preparing to take some members of the group on Azerbaijan to Baku, its capital, the following week. He said: ‘the point is, to put it crudely, there is a bit of money involved … because you’ve got to pay for a lot of these guys to go out there and do all sorts of stuff …’ ‘They’re not going to pay for themselves’. Laird added ‘it’s almost a case of some of these guys think of it as we need an all party group of one- legged lesbians for Europe because it gives you a better position … It gives a guy a place. Everybody else is a bloody chairman of an APPG, why can’t I be a chairman of an APPG?’

He went on to say he could not chair the group but ‘tactics-wise’ it would be ‘better to find a MP to do it.

Laird was selling himself and volunteering that one of his services was to arrange for Parliamentarian questions to be put down in the House of Lords … ‘Some of the guys for instance, in the Lords that I will get down to put questions for me … then I will put down questions for them,’ he said.

The reporter inquired why this was necessary. Laird replied: ‘Well, because if I am employed by you good people and I put down a question which is related to you guys making money … I can do it, but I have to put ‘i’ beside it, which means I’ve got an interest. It’s better not to do it that way, it is better to do it through another guy … there not opposed to it, you’ve just got to signal that this is what’s happening if it is of benefit to someone.’

Lord Laird said he enlisted a ‘coterie’ of friendly peers who could also be used to table amendments. He said he could submit an amendment and take it along to civil servants in the Lords to ‘polish it up’, but would prefer to get another peer to put it down.

The coterie could also be used to speak on debates. ‘If I spoke on your behalf I would have to declare an interest. You can do it, I have done it, but it would be easier to get a

| Laird warned the reporters that they would have to throw money at the group to tempt Parliamentarians to join with the promise of free trips abroad. He said he was preparing to take some members of the group on Azerbaijan to Baku, its capital, the following week. He said: ‘the point is, to put it crudely, there is a bit of money involved … because you’ve got to pay for a lot of these guys to go out there and do all sorts of stuff …’ ‘They’re not going to pay for themselves’. Laird added ‘it’s almost a case of some of these guys think of it as we need an all party group of one- legged lesbians for Europe because it gives you a better position … It gives a guy a place. Everybody else is a bloody chairman of an APPG, why can’t I be a chairman of an APPG?’ | Observation. |
| He went on to say he could not chair the group but ‘tactics-wise’ it would be ‘better to find a MP to do it. | Wouldn’t chair the APPG because of health issues. Tactical advice given in unpaid capacity. |
| Laird was selling himself and volunteering that one of his services was to arrange for Parliamentarian questions to be put down in the House of Lords … ‘Some of the guys for instance, in the Lords that I will get down to put questions for me … then I will put down questions for them,’ he said. The reporter inquired why this was necessary. Laird replied: ‘Well, because if I am employed by you good people and I put down a question which is related to you guys making money … I can do it, but I have to put ‘i’ beside it, which means I’ve got an interest. It’s better not to do it that way, it is better to do it through another guy … there not opposed to it, you’ve just got to signal that this is what’s happening if it is of benefit to someone.’ Lord Laird said he enlisted a ‘coterie’ of friendly peers who could also be used to table amendments. He said he could submit an amendment and take it along to civil servants in the Lords to ‘polish it up’, but would prefer to get another peer to put it down. | Tactical advice (you have achieved more if you are able to persuade another peer of the merits of the case to the extent that they are willing to put down a question) given in unpaid capacity. Standard practice. |
| The coterie could also be used to speak on debates. ‘If I spoke on your behalf I would have to declare an interest. You can do it, I have done it, but it would be easier to get a | Created through the ‘climate of opinion’ approach. |
coterie of people, supporters, and make a point that I would ask them to on this issue.’

Laird also suggested a way to get around the rules of holding private functions for clients. When the reporter said it would be useful to take clients to the Lords, he agreed it could be done, adding: ‘The point is, you wouldn’t call them clients. They’re just friends … it’s better they are just friends.’

I agreed to nothing and would not until checking against the code. My health leaves me in a position where I must check everything in my own time.

Use of the word ‘bribe’ and trips for Parliamentarians

The Code does not forbid Parliamentarians, including members of APPGs from taking trips paid for by a third party. Presumably such trips are acceptable because they are informative and may influence Parliamentarians to make an assessment different from that which they might otherwise have made. It would therefore not be desirable to curtail Parliamentarians’ ability to act on their new understanding.

However, it could be argued that in so doing (ie. taking a trip and subsequently being influenced by the trip), Parliamentarians appear to expose themselves to the possibility of being accused of accepting a bribe. Indeed, it would be very difficult to prove that a bribe had not been given and received. Since it is surely not the intention that the Code should leave Parliamentarians exposed to accusations of giving or taking a bribe it must be assumed that the actions of offering or taking a trip is not considered to be giving or taking a bribe.

I was not using the word ‘bribe’ in its technical sense. I was joking with those I had thought to be in the same profession. To put it another way it was an ‘in’ PR joke.

Incident during Sunday Times lunch

An important incident happened at the very end of the lunch with the Sunday Times. After two hours of discussion, banter and even joke telling, Kevin Cahill and I were keen to leave. I had a very sore head and was feeling stressed. We both stood up to conclude the event and to say good bye. The female got very active and rather upset at this stage. She brought her hand bag or something similar up beside her where she sat opposite to me. She seemed to fiddle with something inside the bag and then said straight at me,” We are offering you a six figure fee if you will do what we want” or words very similar. I was surprised and must have shown it. I quickly said “No” and that they would hear from us the following day. I then said good bye and so did KC. We shook hands and left.

This event is not in the scripts supplied to me.

The six figure fee reappears again in the letter from the Sunday Times listing allegations against me (May 31st) they claim that I agreed a six figure fee. These are similar words to those used in the above incident. They are the only occasions in which a six figure fee is introduced.

Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

I believe in holding HMG to account and because of my declining verbal skills, have relied more and more on written parliamentary questions. I work with a number of researchers to follow lines of questioning.
I used to be a regular speaker in all forms of debate, but not anymore. I speak on average twice a year. Anyone who attended the debate on Azerbaijan will recall when, to the concern of those watching, I lost my line of thought totally and caused a long break. My friends in the Lords, including staff, are very kind in helping me with my difficulties. I could not work there without them.

Putting down PQs and obtaining worthwhile answers is, in my opinion, an art. Each Department’s civil servants are different, some helpful, others do their very best to hide the information required and many have further different approaches.

Since 1999, I estimate that I have placed almost 12,000 PQs on a whole range of topics. On many occasions I was involved with a number of like minded peers. We discussed the PQs collectively and would exchange ideas on further courses of questioning. During that period my memory is that I supplied ideas and questions which may be better tactically to be placed by others. At no time was I either offered or accepted reward for placing PQs.

**Summing up**

In both cases, no terms of a contract were agreed or even discussed in any detail. I said that I would take their cases away, consider (with friends) and respond. This is usual practice in the PR industry (see Sunday Times transcript, page 27).

I made it clear that I would not break the rules (BBC transcript, 13/3/13, pages 37 & 38, Sunday Times transcript, 20/5/13, pages 25, 29, 30 & 36). If interested, I will list the type of areas in which I would only operate. In both cases we did not get anywhere near that stage.

The type of campaign discussed with both was a ‘climate changing’ one. This is the area in which I consider that I have expertise. It is my strong view that the only satisfactory method of changing Her Majesty’s Government’s (HMG’s) view of a topic is to educate the informed public. Create a campaign which has information flowing to MPs from potential voters and you open a line of communication to Ministers. But one does not need to be a member of either chamber to undertake such a campaign.

The BBC scammers in the initial phone conversation with me (7 March 2013 at 12.40pm) said “if we could come up with some consultants, particularly people with parliamentary experience, who have international experience and standing and whatever and see if they might be able to act as consultants or even sit on an advisory panel.” Obtaining a parliamentary person was not vital to this quest and they were looking for a consultant, not an operative.

In the Sunday Times case, this point was made by the ‘Female Reporter’ (page 24) when she said ‘what we’re looking to do is engage probably one consultant or advisor who would work with us—what we’d like ideally is a Parliamentarian.’ Same point applies.

In an email sent to me on 14 May at 3.21pm (supplied) the male reporter indicates that they wished to recruit expert consultants to support their work—no mention of work inside Westminster.

In the accepted PR industry the word consultant means one who gives or sells advice but does not carry out the day to day activity.

In both cases I thought I was dealing with PR professionals and so was using concepts, descriptions and jokes which would have been used when such
consultants meet. I did what I sometimes do and that is to get ‘carried away’ with the atmosphere created and proceed to try to entertain.

In short, in neither case was there a contract; nor was there a memorandum of agreement to lead to a contract. Nor was there a verbal agreement as to what such memorandum or contract should contain. There was simply an exploratory and at times rather muddled conversation as to what such a contract, if it ever did materialise, might properly contain. Such a conversation must be permissible under the rules, how otherwise could one establish legitimate parameters as is encouraged by paragraph 20 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct?

Finally, while I hesitate to do it, I feel that in the present case I should with respect remind the Commissioner that, in a case involving disputed accounts of a conversation, one should be very slow to accept the uncorroborated evidence of somebody who has come to that conversation not with an honestly enquiring mind but rather harbouring the intention, unknown to the other participant, of confirming a previously conceived belief. In such a situation even an honest witness can easily err.

But I say “in the present case” because the Commissioner will be aware of the details of the case of Peter Cruddas claimant and (1) Jonathan Calvert, (2) Heidi Blake and (3) Times Newspapers Ltd (both in the High Court and Court of Appeal) in which not only is the danger strikingly illustrated, but in which the Court has found that two of the very people who here expect to be believed are found to have been, not just inaccurate but, liars.

Appendix L: Interview of Lord Laird by the Commissioner, 29 October 2013

The Commissioner for Standards: Good morning, Lord Laird. Thank you for agreeing to this interview. This interview is being recorded and a transcript will be produced. You will be sent a copy of the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any errors and/or add to anything that you said. The transcript will be appended to my report on your case, but will not be published until the Committee for Privileges and Conduct reports on the case.

I note that you are accompanied and I will in a moment ask your lawyer to identify himself for the benefit of the tape. I should highlight that paragraph 117 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct makes it clear that every effort is made to keep proceedings informal. If a member is accompanied, then they are free to consult their companion but they will be expected to answer for themselves any question put to them. If you wish to consult off the record, please indicate that to me and I will switch the recording device off.

On 31 May, 1 June and 3 June 2013 you contacted me following notice that articles would be published in the Sunday Times and the Sunday Telegraph on 2 June 2013, and subsequently broadcast on the BBC’s “Panorama” programme, alleging that you had breached the Code of Conduct in respect of meetings between you and two undercover BBC reporters on 13 March 2013 and two undercover Sunday Times journalists on 20 May 2013. On 3 June 2013, it became clear that you had referred yourself to me. I obtained the agreement of the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct to proceed to investigate your self-referral.

On 9 July, I provided you with a copy of the transcript provided by the BBC of your conversation with their undercover reporters, together with related material. On 24 July, I provided you with a copy of the transcript provided by the Sunday
Times of your conversation with their undercover journalists. You questioned the accuracy of that transcript, so I asked House of Lords Hansard to re-transcribe the audio-visual footage that was provided to me by the Sunday Times. The Hansard transcript was sent to you on 16 September 2013. On 7 October you sent me a statement responding to the allegations.

In this interview, I will primarily refer to the transcripts of your conversation with the undercover BBC reporters and the undercover Sunday Times journalists. When referring to the BBC, page numbers refer to the page numbers on the transcript as provided by the BBC. When referring to the Sunday Times, page numbers refer to the transcript as produced by Hansard.

The objective of this interview is to seek clarification about some points which arise in the transcripts. I intend to deal first with the allegations arising from the BBC transcript. In that regard, I intend to ask about a proposed all-party group; then about the alleged provision of parliamentary advice and parliamentary services; and finally about hosting a reception in the House of Lords. In dealing with each of these themes, the page references will jump around a little; if at any point I am proceeding too quickly, please just say so.

Are there any points that you would like to make at the outset, or shall we proceed straight to questions? At this stage, I think that it would be useful for the benefit of the tape if all individuals round the table identified themselves. My name is Paul Kernaghan. I am the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards.

Nicolas Besly: I am Nicolas Besly. I am the clerk who assists the Commissioner.

Colin Gowdy: My name is Colin Gowdy, solicitor. I am with Lord Laird.

Lord Laird: My name is John Laird.

The Commissioner for Standards: Thank you. Lord Laird, are there any points that you would like to make at the outset, or should we proceed straight to the questions?

Lord Laird: I think that I should make the point—this applies to both interviews—that we are dealing in an area in which I have a lot of experience: that is, the area of public relations. I ran a company in Belfast that at one stage had 19 employees, although on average there were usually about a dozen. I would be very familiar with people coming along and talking from other PR backgrounds. It would be quite usual to talk to people from other backgrounds and people who are not from a PR background but who come along and say, “Look, I’ve got problem A, B and C. Can you help us solve this?” What I find—I am sorry, but I’ve lost the thread. Just give me a second.

The Commissioner for Standards: Please take your time.

Colin Gowdy: Can we turn the tape off just now?

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes. We’ll do that.

[PAUSE]

The Commissioner for Standards: The tape has now recommenced. If I may, Lord Laird, I will start by looking at the BBC allegations. I invite you to refer to the transcript supplied by the BBC. On the BBC allegations, I am going to look initially at the proposed all-party group on Fiji. On pages 5 to 15 of the transcript, there is a discussion on setting up an all-party group on Fiji. At the top of page 5, DF says an APPG is “a non-negotiable item for our client”. At the top of page
7, you say, “if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it”. Why did you say that?

**Colin Gowdy:** Excuse me. Page 5 of the document that I have says, “DF: So, anyway, I mentioned to you on the ‘phone about the APPG”. That’s the document that we have. Is that the page you’re talking about?

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Yes. As I said, it goes from page 5 to page 15.

**Lord Laird:** So what page are we actually on?

**Colin Gowdy:** I think it starts at 00:54—”So, anyway, I mentioned to you on the ‘phone”. That’s the first reference. Is that right?

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Yes.

**Colin Gowdy:** Then we go to page 7.

**Lord Laird:** I’ve got you now.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** I’m just interested in why you made that comment: “if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it”.

**Lord Laird:** You’ve got to remember that I thought I was dealing with other PR people. In my opinion, when you’re dealing with other PR people, you say things which are, let’s say, meant to be, perhaps, humorous and meant to be in context of other people of the same industry. That would not be necessarily difficult to do, to get an APPG going. To be honest with you, I didn’t know whether there was an APPG involved. There might be an APPG for the South Pacific, or something like that. That is do-able. That is in the context of me talking to somebody who is in my business. I think that you will remember that I positioned this as a very preliminary discussion. This was simply a preliminary discussion. As you will see from the initial conversations that I had with the gentleman [unclear] in the telephone conversations when we talked about the fact that he and I were in the same trade and this type of stuff. So I thought I was talking to someone in the same trade and was trying to be humorous. Being humorous is actually a problem for me.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** I recognise that, but if I may expand on that, I just put it to Lord Laird on the basis of DF saying that an APPG is “a non-negotiable item for our client”, you then say—and you’re saying it with humour—”if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it”. We’ve used the term APPG—APG is sometimes used: all-party group. It is set out in a House of Commons document, but it covers both members of the House of Commons and members of the House of Lords. Examples that I have used in other interviews are that you can have an APG, let us say, to raise money for a children’s cancer charity. I think that everybody on the Clapham omnibus would understand that it was entirely appropriate for parliamentarians who had a mutual interest in combating children’s cancer to create an APG to pursue their interest. Equally, and it’s totally within the rules, there could be a group of parliamentarians, both from the House of Commons and the House of Lords, who have an interest in a particular football club. They are within the rules—it’s a mutual interest and they create an APG in respect of their interest in that football club. What I am trying to say with the two examples is that the groups are created by parliamentarians and there are rules about party balance and composition between the two chambers. But they are created at the volition of members of the two chambers to pursue an interest, be it one that you might classify as worthy or one that you might classify as more quasi-social. In this context, you have someone who is approaching you—
in your terms, you have spoken very much about the public relations industry—and you have agreed that it is do-able. Do you believe that creating an APG at the behest of a client is acceptable?

Lord Laird: I actually don’t believe in APPGs at all. I think that they are a waste of time. But you see the conversation that I was having with him is the sort of thing that—if I was selling double-glazing and I was talking to another guy who was selling double-glazing and I said, “Look, it’s rubbish what the client wants, but that’s what the client wants”. You have to—

Colin Gowdy: Can we stop the tape?

[PAUSE]

The Commissioner for Standards: The tape has recommenced. I’ll clarify. These journalists—we’re currently talking about the BBC—have portrayed themselves as strategic consultants. They have portrayed a scenario that they are seeking to do work in connection with Fiji. Previously, I used the term “client”; I’m open to whatever terminology you wish to describe this encounter. In essence, these consultants are feeling you out with a view to perhaps you working for them on behalf of their ultimate paymasters—for want of a better expression—in Fiji. These consultants—that’s how they’ve described themselves and you haven’t objected when you’ve been discussing with them that they are consultants—are saying, “Our client wants an APPG”. You’ve agreed that, if they want one, you can get them one—”We’ll get them one with a bow on it”. I’m seeking to clarify, and you’ve commented that you, very fairly, do not believe that an APPG is always a very useful mechanism. I’m not interested in the merits. I’m just interested in whether you believe that it is acceptable for an outside body—in this case, consultants—to seek and then to have an APPG created at their behest.

Lord Laird: Well, it depends on what we’re doing. People come along with ideas about, let’s say, fracking. I really don’t involve in APPGs, but I’m working on the basis, for instance, that fracking is a pretty new topic and there’s no APPG on fracking. Now, there might be people coming along and offering to talk about fracking and doing fracking, so it might occur to someone, “Well, perhaps we should have an APPG”. I am not at all keen on APPGs. I don’t actually agree with this type of so-called lobbying; I think it’s nonsense. It’s not what I would do and it’s not what I’ve ever lectured about when I lectured at the University of Ulster. I lectured on public affairs, but it was not this type of thing. I think this type of stuff is a waste of time, but I agree that there are some situations with clients where you’ve got to run the client, if you follow my point.

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes, I recognise that. You used the term there yourself. The client is indicating they want an APPG. Notwithstanding your professional reservations about the efficacy of an APPG, you’ve basically indicated that, if that is what the client wants, you’ll seek to help them create one.

Lord Laird: Well, helping to create—you’ve got to find out who else is interested in, say, Fiji. If there are enough people—you just can’t sort of put a flag up yourself. One has got to—sorry, I’m slightly away again. Sorry about this. I lose the thread.

The Commissioner for Standards: No, please take your time.

Colin Gowdy: Do you want to just clarify the point again, Commissioner, for Lord Laird?

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes, I’m happy to clarify the point. In essence, the consultants who have met you have indicated that their clients want
an APPG—it’s non-negotiable. You then respond, “If the client wants an APPG, we’ll get them one with a bow on it”. The point I’m seeking clarification on is: do you believe it’s acceptable to create an APPG at the behest of a client, at the request of some non-parliamentary body?

**Lord Laird:** To put the thing simply to you, no, I don’t actually.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Well, then I’ve got to ask, if you don’t think that’s appropriate, why did you indicate that you would help them get an APPG?

**Lord Laird:** Don’t forget that I was talking to people who—again, back to this point—I thought were in the same industry as me and perhaps trying to be humorous to them. You cannot just start an APPG at the behest of—there’s all the people who’ve got to be involved, heavily involved. You cannot just sort of put up a flag for an APPG because you’ve been asked by somebody, but it is not impossible. If we were going down the line that—I have in this document talked about a climate of opinion [unclear]. You wouldn’t be too far down the line of a climate of opinion before somebody would come up with the idea of starting an APPG, because actually APPGs are quite popular. We do not get so much involved in them in the Lords, but down in the Commons they mean a lot more. It’s part of the process of convincing constituents and others that you’re a man of worth when it comes to re-election, because here’s the 62 committees you’re on or something like that.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** If we may, I’ll move on slightly. If I could refer you, please, to page 9 of the transcript—the last quarter of the page. You’ll see that says that the client will have to—this is you I’m quoting—“take out the APPG to Fiji”. Then there are elements here—I’m again quoting you: “You show them the best bloody time they’ve ever had. You really stick it to them big time … when the headache’s over and the hangover and everything else and they get back here then all they can remember is a nice fuzzy glow about this south sea island”. Why did you offer that advice?

**Lord Laird:** Because if you’re talking from one PR guy to another PR guy, that is not an unusual type of thing to suggest. What we’ve got to keep in mind is that this is me talking over ideas. When it came to actually talking about the campaign that might be involved if we were going to do a campaign—don’t forget that we’re at the very early stages of anything here—none of this was in the list of things that I suggested. I just suggested a number of things off the top of my head from one PR guy to another PR guy. That shows the type of climate of opinion that one has to create in order to get things done.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** I think what you’re saying is that—if I can characterise it; please correct me if I’m putting it inaccurately—you felt this was talk between PR professionals and this would be the norm.

**Lord Laird:** Yes. The norm might be slightly better. It would be not unusual and recognised. It is not unusual and recognised. I mean, you sort of take a different line with your own people, if you follow what I mean.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Right, thank you. Can I draw your attention to page 15 of the transcript? At the bottom of that page, you talk about the APPG on Azerbaijan and you say, “There’s a hell of a balance to be got at between being seen to manipulate the APPG and manipulating the APPG”. What did you mean by that?

**Lord Laird:** Well, I can’t actually—well, you see, this is back to this point. You’ve got to be very careful with an APPG. There are an awful lot of rules and
regulations. One has got to come back—at least, I’m coming back—to the point that this was a very preliminary discussion. If you remember from the transcript, I made the point that I would not cross the line on any grounds. But things would have to be written down. I mean, you just can’t agree with somebody you’ve got there around a table about what you’re proposing to do in a very delicate and very difficult PR campaign. It’s got to be written down: exactly what you’re proposing to do, with your line of command, with everything organised, so that you know exactly what you’re doing and, if there’s payment involved, what exactly the payment is going to be and for what. Now, one of the reasons for doing that is to go away. I used to have a good memory, but my memory is not as good as it used to be. But even with a good memory, I wouldn’t claim, although having read, obviously, the Code of Conduct and signing the documents saying I had read them—which I have read—but that was a couple of years ago. I cannot say to you that I can recite or know the individual bits—this bit and that bit and the other bit. But as part of putting together the document, which is what we would do, I would go through with care and [unclear] and probably get some of my colleagues to go through it as well. Even when the “Panorama” people broadcast this, they actually even broadcast the point where I said, “I will not break the rules”. Okay? I’m not as clear as I used to be and I haven’t actually done any—as I say, I used to have a PR company which was actually the first in Belfast and was the oldest in Belfast and all sorts of things, and still in existence. I’m of the belief that that was very successful. But I’m not the clever person of 10 years ago.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** No, please. I note that. But what I’m interested in is, you make a statement, “There’s a … balance to be got at … between being seen to manipulate the APPG and manipulating the APPG”. My question, an open question, is: what do you mean by that? Do you feel it’s legitimate to manipulate an APPG?

**Lord Laird:** Well, politics is, you could claim, always about the process of manipulation. As I said, I don’t believe in the use of the APPGs, but you’ve got to be very careful. I’m not terribly well up on the rules of the APPGs and how that fits in, but you’ve got to work in with who you can invite, who you can talk to and what you can talk to them about. That’s where I would be seen to be careful. Really, what I was more or less saying there was, “I’ve got to go back and read my stuff”.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you for that. If we can move on, I’d ask you to turn to page 43 of the transcript. In the middle of page 43, DF asks, “Could not, correct me if I’m wrong, the APPG be used for … isn’t it possible to get people to come in and give talks? Like Foreign Office guys and whatever …” You replied, “I’ll do that”. GT then said, “You can do that as a member of the House of Lords without the APPG?” You replied, “Yeah … well, just what sort of people do you want?” Why did you make those offers?

**Lord Laird:** Well, is that making an offer or is that just me saying, “What is the position?” Again, I come back to the previous answer. Before any deal would be done, before any arrangement—if there was going to be work coming out of this and it was going to be paid work, or even if it wasn’t going to be paid work and just work out of interest, everything would have to be agreed. That is actually in this document as well.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Why at no point in the discussion did you mention that setting up an APPG in return for payment or at the request of a paying client or paying consultant would be against the rules?
Lord Laird: Why did I not?

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes, because the conversation there—let us be clear about this. I am very conscious that they are asking questions to entrap you, for want of a better expression. This is not a straightforward conversation. They have an agenda; they are clearly seeking to get you to go down the roads that they have mapped out. Let us be very clear about that; I’m not naive in that. But I would say to you that setting up an APPG is a provision of a parliamentary service and it is quite specific that that is prohibited by the Code of Conduct, so I’m just interested, when they are seeking to get you to agree to set up an APPG in return for payment or at the request of a paying client, why you did not highlight to them that that was not a non-starter?

Colin Gowdy: Would you not need to put to Lord Laird where they asked him to do it for payment and also the fact that he used the word “we”? It is “we” that was the word when we go back to page 9, I think. He says “We’ll do it”; he doesn’t say, “I’ll do it”. That seems to involve doing it collectively.

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes, I accept that it’s a collective “we”.

Colin Gowdy: It’s nothing at all; it’s miles. This is really, as they say in Ulster, talks about talks.

The Commissioner for Standards: We’ll avoid that. As I say, I am just interested. You’ve said that you signed the Code, but I accept that you are not word perfect on it.

Lord Laird: Far from it.

The Commissioner for Standards: That is not an issue. I am just interested. Did you not feel that the creation of an APPG would be against the rules?

Lord Laird: First, we didn’t know whether there was an APPG. I would have thought that if, back to the points that I made about the various things—I don’t know if you remember, we talked about rugby things and we talked about other things, a group of expatriates and all sorts of things, which is external in a sense. It is not that it is external to Westminster; I think that these things are very useful. But the point is this: that would have led to probably the development of an APPG.

The Commissioner for Standards: If I can pick up one of the points you have made, what do you say to the suggestion that your points in the conversation with these reporters about setting up an APPG were more about whether it would be effective than about whether it would be within the letter and spirit of the Code of Conduct? You have said even in your interview here this morning that, as a PR professional, you would not recommend that they go down this route.

Lord Laird: Wouldn’t bother.

The Commissioner for Standards: You would have other strategies. So I am interested. The conversation you had with them suggests that you didn’t believe an APPG was an effective strategy—

Lord Laird: Yes.

The Commissioner for Standards: But the conversation seemed to be more about you putting your expertise and going, “I wouldn’t go down this road”, as opposed to, “This is not consistent with the letter and spirit of the Code of Conduct”.

Lord Laird: I think we’re back to the point that these were the very first preliminary discussions with people who I thought were in my own trade, as it were. That, to me, if you have a bit of time and you’re a former PR guy, doing the kind of campaign I outlined on that—a PR campaign; I talk about the rugby and all that—that actually would be quite interesting. I wouldn’t be doing it because I don’t have the time or, to be honest with you, the health, to actually run around with a rugby team. It would be a good thing to—I would love to see.

To me, public relations is a little bit like chemistry, in a sense. Sometimes when you add this to this you get a surprise yourself. I strongly believe in the kind of campaign that I was outlining. That’s the climate of opinion campaign. See, I’m more of what—I’ve redefined in the academic world the use of public relations. I don’t go by the PR guy’s definition of public relations; I go by my own. Being an Ulsterman I have to always go by my own. So I talk about this climate of opinion, and that I think is what I regard public relations to be. Now, if you want to have something done—if you want us to shift—let us say, for the sake of argument, you were interested in ensuring that the hour didn’t go back to summer time, or whatever it is. Okay, right. There is no point in knocking at the door and talking to the right person in Westminster, which I would be totally opposed to anyway, because that is a waste of time. But what you do is you create interest in the countries. You go down to the farmers’ unions; you get on to this group, that group, the Mothers’ Union, whatever it is. You create a lobby of opinion, so when people are going to their surgeries and talking to their MPs, they are saying, “What about that hour”, and that sort of stuff. It becomes a talking point, because Westminster is a cauldron. Westminster is a cauldron for these ideas to float about. That could lead to all sorts of things; goodness me, there could even be an APPG on whether the hour should change or not. It’s not necessarily [unclear]. I am just saying that is how—that is in my opinion. You get a lot of people interested. Now, actually, the hour thing would be relatively interesting. But I think that the Fiji one would have been quite interesting because you’re dealing there with rugby and all sorts of things.

The Commissioner for Standards: To narrow the focus, I can see what you’re saying: there’s a climate of opinion, to use your terminology, in your constituency, in various Members of Parliament’s constituencies; it might actually result in the creation of an APPG. But the scenario we are dealing with here in the interview of the BBC undercover journalists is they are obviously saying, “We want to create an APPG on behalf of our client”. I suggest to you that there is a drastic difference between parliamentarians responding to a climate of opinion, be it in the media or in their constituencies, and two consultants saying, “We’d like to create an APPG”. Do you think that’s fair?

Lord Laird: The point is: an APPG would probably emerge from the sort of activities that I was talking about where they were going to do it. I don’t want to speak on the record about APPGs, all right?

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Let us move on. I think we have covered APPGs in some depth.

Lord Laird: Okay.

The Commissioner for Standards: What we are now going to look at is allegations about the provision of parliamentary advice and services or paid advocacy. I would like to refer to the transcript again. At the top of page 21, DF asks: “How can we get things raised in the House, though? I mean, you know, are early day motions any worth, d’you think?” You replied: “Yeah, but they’ve gotta
be controlled”. You then go on to say: “We can raise whatever we want”. What did you mean by that?

**Lord Laird:** Well, again, we’re not talking—there has been no decision on funding, whether there is going to be a funded campaign or anything like that, and I was giving what is a correct answer. Again, that is slightly better than an APPG. But if there’s a debate coming up and you’re the minister, it’s always interesting to throw something in that might create a climate of opinion inside the chamber. But the point is, we come back, there’s no suggestion that I was going to break the rules. There was no suggestion that payment was being offered to me on the basis of breaking—that I would take payment on the basis of breaking the rules. Before we would do anything, if we’re going to do a campaign that is half worthwhile, it has all got to be written out and looked at and understood.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you for that.

**Lord Laird:** Sorry that I’m being a wee bit—

**The Commissioner for Standards:** No, no; it is very important that you convey your mind.

**Lord Laird:** I’m not being strident.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** No, no; feel free, please. Let us not consider it payment for the moment. In the quotations I’ve read out to you there, the consultants said, “How do we get things raised in the House?” Basically you commented, “Early day motions, they’ve got to be controlled”. You then say: “We can raise whatever we want”. I would say that a reasonable construction of that, or interpretation of that, is that they’re saying, “How do we get things raised in the House?”, and you then say, “We can raise whatever we want”. Do you feel it is appropriate for a member of the House of Lords to raise matters in the chamber—early day motions, etc—at the behest of a commercial interest?

Do you want to—yes, we’ll switch off the tape.

*[PAUSE]*

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Clarification was sought there in respect of quotations. As I say, they were snippets. Just to read into the record, after the discussion about early day motions, you say, “We’ve a similar thing in the Lords”, referring to the fact that there is a concept of early day motions. The reporter says, “Oh, right”. The other reporter says, “Fine. OK. OK.” You then state: “We can raise whatever we want. Erm ... Do any of their senior guys ... does the Commodore come over here?” There would be an interpretation that “We can raise whatever we want” refers to you and your colleagues in the House of Lords, and quite rightly members can raise whatever they wish. I am interested, then, why you go straight from “We can raise whatever we want” to “any of their senior guys ... does the Commodore come over here?”

**Lord Laird:** That’s not attached to that. I don’t know if it looks—it would be good regardless of what country it was if the senior guy, the boss guy, the current guy or whatever it happens to be, was available and came over here, because there are all these things that other people will want to ask him. They will want to put all sorts of questions to him. “What about your human rights record?” It may not be human rights, but you know what I mean. There would be this issue, that issue and the other issue. That, in my opinion, is totally justifiable. Okay, this has been a scam, but until I discovered that it was a scam, I got interested. I’d like to have met the guy.
The Commissioner for Standards: Fair enough, but the reporters are very clear: “How can we get things raised in the House”?

Lord Laird: That’s “we”; that’s them.

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes, sorry. Let’s be clear about that. The reporters said: “How can we get things raised in the House”—obviously on behalf of their clients. Why did you not say that that wasn’t permitted? Their suggestion, “How can we get things raised in the House”—I would suggest that they’re not entitled to get anything raised in the House in terms of a contractual relationship.

Lord Laird: I’m talking about we, the members. We can raise—

Colin Gowdy: “In terms of a contractual relationship”—that’s what the Commissioner said. There isn’t one.

Lord Laird: My e-mail box is quite spectacularly full every day with all sorts of people asking all sorts of things—issues that are current. An awful lot of these issues are being raised by people from—it’s the energy people. Well, it’s not actually the energy people letting us down—the banks let us down—but it could be a bank coming on to ask: “Here’s a briefing. There’s this clause—what can you do about it?”

Colin Gowdy: Can we just stop there?

[PAUSE]

The Commissioner for Standards: The tape is back on.

Lord Laird: It would be totally incorrect and, in my opinion, it would go over the line if you did something—if I raised a topic in the chamber for a consideration. That is as clear in my mind as it can be, but that doesn’t stop raising topics for someone who has a genuine case and who happens to be making money out of it. They’re not giving me money. They’re coming to say, “Black should be white in that instance there”. I look at it and I think, “Well, that’s fair enough”.

The Commissioner for Standards: In that second suggestion, basically there’s no contractual relationship in what you’ve said. If a member of the public says, “I’ve got a grievance”, they might well get money out of it but you’re raising it in your overall capacity as a member of the House of Lords.

Lord Laird: Yes. Exactly.

Colin Gowdy: That’s it.

The Commissioner for Standards: Fine. Thank you. Right, if we can move on, at the top of page 28, DF suggests engineering a debate in the Lords on Fiji. The exchange continues, and I’m now quoting:

“LL: Yeah, but I mean again, you see, I don’t believe, you see, your client would love a debate. Cause he likes to read Hansard, page after page after page, but if you run a debate, the minister who’s answering the debate will have been given all the answers from the civil servants. The clever thing in all these situations is to have a sufficient number of people genned up all over the place about … about Fiji that they can either with a flash of their brain suddenly or even have it even organised, throw into another debate …

GT: Oh, I see, a debate that’s not specifically about Fiji …

DF: Yes …
GT: And then bring it up …
LL: Because then you’ll get the minister to make a fluff.
DF: Ah, right. Take them by surprise.
GT: Yeah …
LL: He hasn’t been prepared so he’ll [makes fluffling noise]. Oh, we’ll consider that yes, because that’s what they’ll say, oh we’ll consider that. Then you’ve got them to say that then you’ve got them on a wee bit of a hook, but the point is, look if you run a debate you are holding a bull fight in a circus, or something like that, I’m mixing all my metaphors, so all the anti people and all the [inaudible], they’ll be there.”

Can I ask: why did you offer that advice? Why did you not make mention of the Code of Conduct or the rule against paid advocacy?

Lord Laird: Because there was no suggestion of paid advocacy there. What I said there was actually correct. I mean, it was badly put, but if you want to get something out of a minister, it’s best to ambush him, because if you don’t ambush him, he’ll be all prepared for you. If you can ambush him and get him—he or she—to put something on the record which is to your favour, that’s part of the art of the job.

The Commissioner for Standards: I accept that. That’s a reasonable statement of the way Parliament operates etc. But I’m interested that you’ve acknowledged that the consultants’ client would like a debate and then you are giving advice—is it a set-piece debate on Fiji, do you get them to ask questions in other debates etc? You make the point that, if the minister isn’t prepared, they might very reasonably say, “I’ll take that point away”, rather than, if they are prepared, they might go, “You’re wrong”, and move on. I’m interested in the scenario painted by the consultants—you are giving advice on it and I’m interested to know why you offered that advice.

Lord Laird: Because it is correct.

The Commissioner for Standards: Fine. Thank you for that.

I’d now like to take you to the top of page 35, if I may. DF asks, “can we also call upon you to do some of the bog standards that will just please our client a la raising things in the House?” You replied, “yeah … I’ll not things myself but we’ll get other people if you like that’s the point.” Was your point that, although you wouldn’t raise things in the House on behalf of the client, you would ask other Lords to?

Lord Laird: Not if it’s going to be paid—not if it’s paid for that sort of stuff.

The Commissioner for Standards: Can we clarify that? Are you saying that, if you are in a contractual relationship with these consultants, you wouldn’t do that, but if you had developed a personal, unpaid interest in Fiji, you would ask other Lords to ask questions?

Lord Laird: I might. There might be other guys who are more appropriate. As Nick may know, I’m quite good at asking the odd written question and sometimes you change them. There’s a guy, one of your colleagues, one of your friends—they don’t have to be colleagues, because they’re multi-party—who’s got an interest in X, Y or Z and you’ve come up with a new line on X, Y and Z. It makes more sense sometimes if you put the idea to him and he puts it down. You’d certainly be checking with X, Y or Z that that’s not an issue where I’m going to make a fool of
myself. The sort of coterie of people who ask a lot of questions know each other and know what their particular interests are. There would be a totally informal—"Fred, what about this one here? Would that make more sense to you? I’ve had another thought. What about this other issue here?” There’s quite a bit of that.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Thank you.

If I could move you further down page 35 you say: “if I take this on, obviously there is, I would be doing it for monetary reward, and I don’t want … I don’t want to be having to unveil that because it weakens the position”. What did you mean by that?

Lord Laird: Again, we’ve got to go back to the point that, if I took this thing on, I’d want to check through all the details and everything else of the Code. If I took on the ideas that I’d thought of, the rugby list—you know the list that I’m talking about?

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes.

Lord Laird: I would have to be sure that that wasn’t going to affect my ability to do things for which I was not paid. It might look bad. For the sake of argument, let’s say that we did develop this and I got a contract written out which talked about the rugby and the other things, okay? I’d have to check very carefully. Because I’m helping him in that area, does that affect this area? I don’t want—don’t forget that this is a preliminary meeting, if you like, and we’re still trying to feel our way and think what’s required. We’re miles away from coming to any kind of agreement about anything. To be blunt, also, I’ve lost the ability to put things with the total clarity of words now that I may have had, but that’s what I was coming across.

The Commissioner for Standards: We’ve been talking about Early Day Motions, debates, questions, asking other people to ask questions, and we clarified paid relationship and a genuine interest in a topic area etc. In this section, you state: “if I take this on, obviously there is, I would be doing it for monetary reward, and I don’t want … I don’t want to be having to unveil that because it weakens the position”. The way I read that is that there’s a scenario here where you would be in receipt of monetary reward and that, if I link it with the previous point, you might ask Lord X to ask a question rather than yourself, because you have declared, you’ve complied with the Code, you’ve registered an interest. That might detract from the impact of your question, because people would go, “Lord Laird has asked that question. He’s got a financial interest, therefore he’s a paid employee”—for want of a better expression—”or paid lobbyist”, whereas if Lord X asks the question, Lord X has no registered interest, “We can accept that that’s a very interesting point that Lord X is asking”. The quotation from you seems to suggest that, if you were in a monetary reward situation—”I don’t want to be having to unveil that because it weakens the position”—you would ask Lord X to ask a question on your behalf. Is that an inappropriate construction on it?

Lord Laird: I think that it is an inappropriate construction.

The Commissioner for Standards: Just above 02:41, for reference, you say, “if I take this on, obviously there is, I would be doing it for monetary reward, and I don’t want … I don’t want to be having to unveil that because it weakens the position”.

Lord Laird: I think that it’s not an interpretation that I’d put on that.

The Commissioner for Standards: Can I invite you to say what interpretation you would put on it?
Lord Laird: I was quite hopeful that they may be interested in my ideas—what I call the rugby list of ideas. I’d be interested in dealing with that. I talked earlier about the chemistry. There’s topics there. It may be that, in doing that section for monetary reward, it’s going to stop me doing the other. In fact, I might just have to do the thing for nothing. If it was only giving advice, I’d be quite prepared to have done that. They’re the people who talked money, not me.

The Commissioner for Standards: “I would be doing it for monetary reward”.

Lord Laird: Well, that is what they were talking about.

The Commissioner for Standards: Sorry, I’m quoting you: “if I take this on, obviously there is, I would be doing it for monetary reward”.

Lord Laird: Well, therefore I have to go away and check. Don’t forget that everything has to be written down—it’s listed. Even in this conversation, I talk about, “We’ve got to produce a paper. It’s all got to be produced”. It could very well be that at the next meeting I’d have to go back to them and say, “Look, you hit me out of the blue. Here’s a list of things that I have now clarified in my own mind. I will not, not, not, not, not—in fact, so much not that I’ll give you a bit more advice for nothing and that’ll be that”. In a funny kind of way, I’m reluctant to not give them advice for nothing. I would have been quite happy to have done this for nothing. I sort of feel that’s what I’m here for, to help people.

The Commissioner for Standards: I recognise that, but if I could, in fairness to you, give you a little bit more. At the bottom of page 35, you say:

“but if I asked a question I have to declare an interest. Now that doesn’t stop me, we can still do that. That’s fine. But you want more than me. You don’t … you don’t want it sounding as if the only bloody person in Parliament who raises any bloody thing about Fiji is the guy they pay”.

Did you think it was permissible to ask questions on behalf of a paying client so long as you declare an interest?

Lord Laird: Well, I’d have to check it out with the Code. As I understand it, as long as you declare an interest, you can take part in a debate. That’s my understanding—that you can take part. As long as you flag up the interest, you can take part in a debate. But it’s for the general good. It’s not for X, Y or Z who lives in Fiji and who’s worried about their tourist industry or whatever it is. It’s for the good of the country. I understand that. I would check that, obviously. That goes back to the point that everything had to be written down and agreed.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Thank you for that.

Lord Laird: Sorry for being strident.

The Commissioner for Standards: No, no, please. There’s no issue at all. Let me clear about this. I am very conscious not only with yourself but with any peer I am investigating on foot of a complaint or self-referral, as in your case, that it’s about their reputation and it’s important to them. So please don’t worry in the least if you are emotional, emphatic—

Lord Laird: I am a bit, but that’s—I just don’t want to be taken wrongly.

The Commissioner for Standards: I recognise that. If I could move you on, please, to the bottom of page 36. DF talks about a trip to Fiji enticing people to join the APPG. You say, “I’ll deny having said this but it’s a kind of bribe”. What did you mean by that?
**Lord Laird:** I was making a joke. It was one of those sort of internal jokes. We talk in our industry—perhaps not talk about it, but it’s widely recognised that if you take someone on a bit of what’s known as a run-out they tend to fall into what you’re wanting to do. I mean, this is me talking to another PR guy. Again, don’t forget—

**Colin Gowdy:** Does Lord Laird not deal with that on page 14 of his submission to you?

**The Commissioner for Standards:** I’m seeking clarification. Let’s be clear. Your position, as I understand it, is that you’re putting this conversation very much in the context of a conversation between PR professionals.

**Lord Laird:** Yes, a first conversation.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Fine, but what I would say is that for the man or woman on the Clapham omnibus if it’s announced that their local MP has gone to Hawaii, San Francisco or any exotic place that would cost a lot of money to go to and they were there as part of the sub-committee on beach tourism, for the sake of argument, people will smile. I think that’s an accepted reality, particularly if they’re going to some company or country that’s sponsoring them. “I’ll deny having said this but it’s a kind of bribe”. I think people question this, not just in a PR context. People think it if you go somewhere nice. On the other hand, if you go to somewhere, let’s say North Korea, as part of a delegation, I don’t think that people would consider that, to use a vernacular phrase or colloquial expression, a jolly. It’s not just confined to the PR world is what I’m trying to say. I’m just interested, because DF talks about a trip to Fiji enticing people to join the APPG and you, “I’ll deny having said this but it’s a kind of bribe”. I think what you’re saying to me is that this is just PR talk between PR people, but—

**Lord Laird:** Exactly, exactly. It wasn’t meant to be listened to by the guy on the Clapham omnibus. It was me talking to a fellow colleague.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Right. Thank you for that. If we can move on, please, to page 37, in the middle of the page you say, “If you want to break the rules, I would be acting, let’s say, like a consultant who just happens to be in Parliament but not using my position in Parliament because that I think is not, that’s not correct, if you follow my point”. Can I invite you just to clarify what you meant by that?

**Lord Laird:** Yes, it’s back to this—let me read it again.

If you remember the previous words: I will not break the rules—"you cannot break the rules”. I come back to the point that I would be checking to see what is what. It depends again what the list of activities were that I was being required to do. It is quite clear there: I cannot break the rules. I’m quite honest in saying that, as I sat there, I may not have fully understood what the rules were, but nothing’s agreed. It was going to be written out and I was going to find out exactly what the nuances of the rules were. It was a sort of rough thing.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you. I have only one question in respect of hosting a reception in the Lords. Can we turn, please, to page 41? In the middle of page 41, you offer to host a reception in the Lords. Why did you do so, when it is against the rules to host functions for the benefit of organisations in which the host Peer has a financial interest?

**Lord Laird:** Well, there’s no talk of financial interest. The point is the Fiji rugby team. What does it say? It could be that there might be a reception run in the Lords for those guys. I mean that would be quite interesting if they were coming
over here. I’d have to check that again as to how that fits in with the rules and regulations, but I can’t—I’m only throwing ideas out. Look, I didn’t know what these guys were going to talk to me about in detail, so I did not go to this meeting prepared with the whole knowledge of this and the whole knowledge of that. I didn’t think that they were reporters; I thought that they were guys in my industry. I didn’t sort of turn up having spent the previous night learning the rules again. I’m only throwing out ideas. I’m not as verbally dextrous as I was in the old days and I may have put it somewhat incorrectly. I would have to check whether that was possible.

The Commissioner for Standards: Are you saying that, as far as you were concerned, that was an idea as opposed to an offer? I think that’s what you’re saying.

Lord Laird: Yes, it had to be checked up.

The Commissioner for Standards: Rather than offering, that was just a throwaway thought.

Colin Gowdy: Yes.

Lord Laird: Yes.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Thank you for that. I am conscious, Lord Laird, that we have been talking for approximately an hour. That finishes my questions in respect of the BBC. I suggest, subject to your agreement, that we have a break now and reconvene at 1.30, when we’ll go through the Sunday Times allegations, if that’s acceptable to you.

Lord Laird: Would it be acceptable to make that 2 o’clock?

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes. I am conscious, because of other background material, that I’ll not force the pace. I’m quite happy to reconvene at 2 o’clock.

Colin Gowdy: In the interests of time, what time do you think we’ll conclude? You know the number of questions that you have to ask.

The Commissioner for Standards: I would hope—and obviously it’s important that Lord Laird expresses himself as he wishes to express himself—that by 4 o’clock would be realistic.

Colin Gowdy: What time is the last flight?

The Commissioner for Standards: I’m afraid I don’t know, but I could check for you.

Lord Laird: What airline are you on?

Colin Gowdy: BA. Could you check?

The Commissioner for Standards: I’ll do that for you. We’re now having a break and we’ll reconvene at 2 o’clock.

[BREAK]

The Commissioner for Standards: Interview reconvened at 14.08. We now turn to the allegations arising out of your conversation with the undercover Sunday Times journalists.

Lord Laird: Yes.
The Commissioner for Standards: I intend to ask first about lobbying, then about an all-party group, then about alleged paid advocacy, then about invitations to the House of Lords, then about payment, then about declaring the interest, and finally about e-mails sent after the meeting with the *Sunday Times* undercover journalists. First, I want to deal with lobbying. Can I ask you if you would refer to the transcript of your meeting with the *Sunday Times* journalists as produced by House of Lords Hansard, so that we’re working off the same document?

Lord Laird: But the point is they worked off a different document.

The Commissioner for Standards: But I want to go off the document that we are claiming we’re satisfied with. You queried the accuracy of the *Sunday Times* one and want to work off the one that was produced by the House of Lords Hansard.

Lord Laird: This is the one about which they made the prior publicity, you see.

Nicolas Besly: It is essentially the same.

Lord Laird: Okay.

The Commissioner for Standards: It is just that you queried it, so in fairness to you I want to go off one that was transcribed by House of Lords Hansard personnel as opposed to the *Sunday Times*. I think that’s more in fairness to you, more appropriate.

Lord Laird: I recognise that the other one is actually a mess. I think it’s a mess.

The Commissioner for Standards: This is one that we have the electronic record for, and independent people have produced this transcript. Can I ask you to turn to page 27 of the *Sunday Times* transcript? In the middle of page 27 the female reporter refers to trying to engage parliamentarians, and talking to MPs and peers about the product. You then say: “the key to this is the backbenchers. You go to government, and their civil servants will not allow them to do anything outside, if you can get away with it, anything outside the frame of what the civil servants want. You need the backbenchers, the guys like myself, in both chambers, who hold the government to account and have a way to hold the government to account and putting these things to government. So you’ve got to build up a good lobby there, a good understanding”. What did you mean by that statement?

Lord Laird: What page is that again?

The Commissioner for Standards: That’s page 27.

Lord Laird: Sorry, yes. I think we’re back to the point, and the previous one, that throughout this transcript I’m saying, “Look, I will not cross the line. I will not go anywhere near the line”. I’m talking about the document having to be put in writing. Again it is the point that this is a preliminary discussion about a preliminary discussion almost. Okay? It is a fair point that really you don’t get much go with the civil servants because they have a line to follow. If you want to do something it is better to work with the backbenchers, whose job it is not to push necessarily one party’s view, but they’re much more flexible in their attitude, particularly in the guys I tend to go about with—that’s the Crossbenchers.

The Commissioner for Standards: Thank you for that. If I can then ask you to move on to page 33.

Lord Laird: Yes.
The Commissioner for Standards: On page 33 there is talk about where to site a plant producing the solar energy product. Reference is made to siting it in the constituency of a minister. On page 34 you say:

“it’s not just a case of saying, ‘We want to build a factory in Yorkshire, and you’ve got to look at the political implications’. The thing is, what it must never do, and I’ll never do, is cross the line into, you know, sort of the bad area. Because there are things that we can’t do and I can’t do. That’s totally acceptable”.

Can I invite you to clarify what you meant there?

Lord Laird: The point I think I was getting at is that if perchance you are trying to do something and you discover that whatever you’re trying to do was likely to create jobs in or near one of the minister’s constituencies, you’ve certainly got an ear. But again I’m going back to the point that I’m not going to break the rules; the rules are there and I’ve got to divvy up the rules. Again I was making the point, or subliminally making the point, that possibly I do not know every nuance in the rules. I don’t. But the rules are there and I will go back to them.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. It is just you go on to say:

“It’s just that we happen to know the way around the playing pitch, so you’re in a slightly better position. So we’ll always be very careful on that line, but, I mean, it is quite legitimate to scratch your head and wonder where you’re going to put a factory, and who you talk to about the factory”.

Is that consistent with what you’ve just said to me?

Lord Laird: Yes.


Lord Laird: Politics is all about using whatever tools you have to get things done, dealt with, inside—not in a bad land, as I think I mentioned.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Thank you. I’m going to move on to all-party groups, in the context of the Sunday Times conversation. If I can ask you to look at page 28 of the transcript, please. In the middle of page 28, the male reporter raises the issue of setting up an all-party group on solar energy. Then, if you turn to the top of page 29, you say: “we need a support team of other parliamentarians because it’s not tactically—it’s not tactically good for one person to have decreed because I would have to declare this. I mean, obviously if I’m working for you guys I have to declare it, which is fair enough. I mean that’s the rules”. What did you mean by reference to it not being good tactically?

Lord Laird: Well, you do need a kind of group of people for APPGs, although as you know I’m not keen on APPGs. But you can annoy the chamber by being a single-issue person—he’s the only person who wants [unclear] sort of stuff.

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes.

Lord Laird: Okay, you can annoy them. So you do need other people about you.

The Commissioner for Standards: I recognise how you don’t want a person who, whatever the debate is, keeps raising their hobbyhorse.

Lord Laird: People yawn and make fun of you if you stand up.

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes. But can you see also that it could be read, and I think the Sunday Times is probably making this construction, that over
and above yourself, basically you need a support team of other parliamentarians, because you have highlighted there that if you are working for these guys, the consultants, you would have to declare it. So, in a sense, you recognise that your independence in that scenario would be affected; people in the chamber would recognise that you have declared in accordance with the rules; therefore anything you say, to use an expression, has to be aimed off. But there may be other people. What relationship were you suggesting in respect of the wider support team of other parliamentarians?

**Lord Laird:** Again, this is preliminary discussions—discussions about discussions, about discussions, if you follow the point. To be honest it hadn't got that far. Again, sorry if I'm labouring this.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** No; please.

**Lord Laird:** I thought I was dealing with people who were in the same business as me. And don’t forget—and this applies to the other transcript as well—in the initial conversations they didn’t say they were looking for a parliamentarian. Ideally, they said, they would like a parliamentarian. So it was not necessarily that they were looking for someone who was in Parliament, which gave me the view again—back to the point that there was perhaps a lot of other stuff, not just Parliament. And again, I would have to go away and check. And again I talk in this document about writing out what exactly we would do and how we would do it and all the other stuff, which is important. And again, I also—in fact, I think even more in this document than in the previous one—say we cannot go anywhere near the line.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you for that. On page 29 the discussion about an APG continues, and you say: “Everybody else is a bloody chairman of an APPG, why can’t I be a chairman of an APPG?” Why did you say that?

**Lord Laird:** It’s not usual. That’s me just speaking aloud in a sense. It is most odd. If you are a peer and chairman of an APG, in a kind of way it devalues the APG. At least that’s the internal—what you would get in the bars.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Right.

**Lord Laird:** The reason for that is that, if it is a significant APG, the MPs will be racing and knocking at your door to get in and be chairman of it. Okay? But if you couldn’t get a chairman of it and you ended up with a peer as the chairman of the thing, it would be seen by fellow parliamentarians as not having the gravitas of one. That is what I was simply saying. I was somebody talking aloud, but again all these things are subject to the document.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you. If I can move you on to page 30, please.

**Lord Laird:** Yes.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** At the top of page 30, you say: “the point is that, to put it crudely, there’s a bit of money involved, you know, because you’ve got to pay for a lot of these guys to go out there and do all sorts of stuff, who knows what”. What did you envisage them paying for?

**Lord Laird:** Well, if they were going to involve themselves with any of the groups or anybody, what I didn’t know, for instance, is whether there is a Korea—I still don’t know; I’ve never looked it up—APPG. Okay, so if they’re actually doing a run to Korea or if a run could be organised for them, you want them to go to the
factory and meet the people. Again, it’s the personal contact—Fred meets Joe and they’re all good buddy-buddy friends and that type of stuff—and that takes money.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** So basically it would be travel etc?

**Lord Laird:** Oh yeah. You’ve got to pay for their expenses.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Right, fine. Thank you. If we can move to the bottom of page 30, the male reporter asks if you could help them set up the APG. You reply: “Oh, I would have thought so”. Why did you agree to set up an APG?

**Lord Laird:** I agreed to help them.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Right.

**Colin Gowdy:** Is that fair to say “agreed to set up an APG”. “Oh, I would have thought you might be able to help us”. It is conditional.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Taking your point on behalf of Lord Laird, and recapping, the male reporter states: “Do you think you might be able to help us set up a parliamentary group?” You respond: “Oh, I would have thought so”. So—

**Lord Laird:** It is a possibility.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** It is a possibility. Thank you. Again, in the context of the *Sunday Times* encounter, do you consider it to be within the rules for a member to help set up an APG at the behest of a commercial organisation?

**Lord Laird:** Well, it depends whether the person who is setting it up has been paid to set it up or not.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Right.

**Lord Laird:** I wouldn’t think it was the proper thing, subject to checking the rules, but gut feeling would be that it would not be the right thing to do to take money for setting up an APPG. But it’s never actually happened. This is an interesting question. It has never actually happened, but if somebody came from the banks and wanted an APG on banking—”I think it’s a good idea. I’ll see if I can get a few guys together”, but didn’t seek money for it, to me that’s totally reasonable.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Just to clarify, and tell me if I’m interpreting you correctly or not, in the scenario you have just sketched out, that would be a group of banks coming to you but there would be no money involved.

**Lord Laird:** No, exactly; no money.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** I just wanted to clarify that.

**Lord Laird:** No, I would have to think it was a good idea and perhaps do a bit of research. I’d go away and research it. There are APGs on every damn thing you can think of. There’s all sorts of groups. So you’d have to check. Now there’s 101 on banking or something, but you have to check the wee bit that they want and see if anybody else is interested. I mean, again I use the fracking example because that is a thing that has come on to the agenda over the last number of months. The last time I looked at that there was no fracking—

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Right.

**Lord Laird:** I think there probably is by now, but there was none.
The Commissioner for Standards: Thank you. Staying in this area, why at no point of the discussion about the APPG did you express caution as to whether setting up one of the requests of the journalist would be within the rules?

Lord Laird: Because it’s the very first meeting. It’s the preliminary of the preliminary of the preliminary. In this document, you’ll find where I say, “We’ve got to write down what it is we’re going to do”, and that would allow me an opportunity prior to that. If I could underline this, and excuse me for underlining it, I had 23 years as an executive running a PR agency. You wrote out carefully everything that was going to be done and you stuck to it, and you only moved away from that with the consent of the people involved. In preparing the list of things that you had to do, you would check notices; I mean, you would check all sorts of stuff as to whether what you were doing was in keeping with the rules and regulations that applied to that industry, or even the law, or all sorts of things before you wrote it out, before you got it done. You would get it agreed. You would then have it agreed with the client at that stage. At that stage, if money was going to be involved, you would look at what sort of timescale you’d got and you might have to say, “This is going to be three days a month or something like that”.

The Commissioner for Standards: Thank you for that. I ask you now to turn to page 35 of the transcript. Please bear with me, but, in fairness, I am going to read a fairly large portion of the transcript. You say:

“Very informal. The point is, it’s done on a—Some of the guys, for instance, in the Lords where I will get them to put down questions for me.

Female Reporter: You get them to put down questions?

Lord Laird: Yeah, and then I put down questions for them. And then what you do is sort of er—

Female Reporter: And what’s the reason for getting them to do it and not doing it yourself?

Lord Laird: Well, because if I’m employed by you good people and I put down a question which is related to you guys making money, I’d have to put an “I” beside it because I’ve got an interest.

Female Reporter: Oh I see, and that draws a lot of attention and—

Lord Laird: Well, it’s fine, and you get the same answer. It’s better not to do it that way. It’s better to do it through another guy, and then a—

Male Reporter: Is this in relation to Azerbaijan?

Lord Laird: No, anything, anything.

Male Reporter: Or in relation to other clients?

Lord Laird: Anything, anything. Anything at all where you’ve got a financial interest and the answer could be [unclear]. They’re not opposed to doing it, you’ve just got to signal that this is what is happening if it’s of benefit to someone.

Female Reporter: Yes. That’s very—So this is the sort of thing that we just would have no idea how that sort of thing works. It’s so helpful to have someone who’s an expert explain.
Lord Laird: Yeah, and that’s totally legitimate. All that’s totally legitimate. Nobody—I’d be very careful. We have to be careful, because I mean, I’m not—I mean, you wouldn’t expect me to cross the line. I mean, this is rather—I wouldn’t cross the line.

Female Reporter: No.

Lord Laird: I know you’re not saying I would cross the line, I know”.

This is the first mention of tabling questions in the Lords. Why did you bring the subject of tabling questions up?

Lord Laird: This is all based on the concept that it would need to be checked out. As I kept saying, I will not cross the line. I was just explaining the way some things operated.

The Commissioner for Standards: Can I put it to you that, on that extract that I have read out, it seems fairly clear that you are suggesting that on some occasions, rather than ask a question yourself, you could arrange for another Lord to ask a question on your behalf?

Lord Laird: Well, that would not be for money, obviously. We hadn’t talked anything like that. That’s back to the discussion we had earlier. Don’t forget I was coming to this totally cold, with the merest indication of what the topic was likely to be. It could be on a bit of investigation—and it would need to be; I would need to do investigation before I would get involved in a thing like this. It may be that there are people in the Lords, for example, who are interested in this type of topic and who’ve got something to say on this, and that maybe I would go and talk to them. But the point is that is all down to putting the thing down in written form and agreeing to it, and that’s the operation where I didn’t agree to anything. I was always saying, “Look, I will not break the rules. Now, I’ve got to go now and look to see what the rules are”.

The Commissioner for Standards: Can I put it this way? I can see, if there were a group of peers who had previously expressed an interest in an area, you might legitimately—and we’re talking about an environment where there’s no money aspect, but you’ve an area of interest—co-ordinate between yourselves: “You ask that question; I’ll ask this complementary question”. But if it’s in this scenario, would you be going round every member of the House of Lords to find out their interests?

Lord Laird: Oh, God, no. It’d be very easy to find out their interests—they are listed for a start, mostly. You’ve just got to look up the index of some past Hansards to find who is making waves about fracking and blah-blah-blah or whatever it happened it to be. You’d say to the guy, “Look, what is your interest in fracking? Here’s a point here and here’s a point there, and there’s a point somewhere else”. In a sense, that’s what I think is a good side of Parliament; that’s what it’s all about. I have taken an interest in fracking, but if I met some of the MPs, which I have done—I’ve talked to some of the MPs who live around Morecambe Bay and this sort of stuff. That’s very interesting to get their perspective.

The Commissioner for Standards: If I can focus on the phrase: “Some of the guys, for instance, in the Lords where I will get them to put down questions for me”. Maybe I’m being obtuse here, but surely if it’s a question of interest to you, you can table it; you don’t need to get another member of the House of Lords to table a question for you.
**Lord Laird:** Well, that may be loose wording, but there is an upper limit to the amount of questions you can put down. Sometimes it may look better for tactical purposes for it coming from somebody else who’s got an interest. I don’t know if there is a Lord Heysham Bay or something, but you know what I mean—that type of thing. But, again, this has all got to be investigated and looked at etc, and I’m quite determined—and I think this determination comes out through the script—that I wasn’t going to break the rules. I mightn’t at that precise moment know exactly every jot and tittle of the rules, but I wasn’t going to break them.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** The way I’m reading it, and correct me if I’m wrong, you’re sketching out a scenario there where you might have a financial interest in a particular area but you would get someone else to ask a question on your behalf.

**Lord Laird:** At this point in time, this is pondering; anything is open—everything is. But I would have to look to see what the rules and regulations are, because this is a sort of work, to be honest with you, that I’ve never really done since coming to the Lords, so I would be need a fair bit of boning-up on what—to be blunt, I haven’t read from beginning to end the Code of Conduct since the time I signed the document. I’m sorry about that.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** No, that’s fine. Can I ask what other Lords have asked questions in the past on your behalf?

**Lord Laird:** Well, a notable one that I used to deal with is a fellow called Lord Corbett of Castle Vale. He and I checked and changed a lot of stuff because we were both interested in the same sort of thing. He’d be the best example, I think.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Sure. What sort of subject area roughly?

**Lord Laird:** Police.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Fine. That’s great. Thank you for that. Have you reciprocated and put questions down on behalf of other peers?

**Lord Laird:** As I sit here now, I can’t think of any. Don’t forget, I think I put down somewhere in the region of 12,000 in the past 14 years, and Nicolas has been part of the system.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** That’s fine. Do you think it’s in keeping with a requirement to act on your personal honour to ask other Lords to table questions because you feel it would not be appropriate for you to ask the question because of your financial interests?

**Lord Laird:** Would you just say that again, please?

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Yes, gladly. Do you think it’s in keeping with a requirement to always act on your personal honour to ask other Lords to table questions because you feel it would not be appropriate for you to ask the question or questions because of your financial interests?

**Lord Laird:** It’s a hypothetical question, isn’t it?

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Well, you can take it as a hypothetical.

**Lord Laird:** Okay, it’s a hypothetical question. Again, it would depend. I would have to look very closely at the rules. I want to emphasise the point that these people were not there for my good, asking me these questions.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** I acknowledge that.
**Lord Laird:** I know you do. The very kind way that you’re giving me plenty of time to answer this and to think about it—they weren’t doing that and I was being pushed into it—no, not being pushed; they weren’t best treating me. There was a continual barrage of stuff, and I was doing my best to try. I was also very nervous, I have to say. That’s why I summoned a wee bit on the humour and tried to—my biggest problem in life since the heart disability is stress. As part of that, I use the humour and as part of that I use trying to answer the question anyway. Now, I would always have the backstop, and it’s a very important backstop to me, that there’s a document to be written and to be checked and we go back. Now, in a sense, since my illness, which incidentally they knew about—that’s one of the things that really annoyed me about them; they knew my state of health and yet they went on ahead.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** I recognise that you’ve said clearly that you would look at the rules, and you’ve highlighted that your backstop, as you classify it, is the document. You’d go back, check the document and then go back once you’d checked the document.

**Lord Laird:** Oh, yes. If this were genuine, I would have. Yeah.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** But surely it’s more basic, more straightforward: it’s about transparency. Why would you get somebody else to ask a question when you can ask it yourself even if you have to declare an interest?

**Lord Laird:** Well, there might be a series of reasons, like it might be more appropriate for somebody else or you might be treading on somebody else’s territory, but again I come back to this point—and I underline this point—that they were firing questions at me the whole time. They were deliberately—and that’s their job—trying to trip me up. I’m not the sharpest tool in the box anymore, even if I ever considered that I was. I was conscious I was under pressure, and I was actually concerned about the stress. If I could divert one wee small bit on there—

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Please.

**Lord Laird:** My problem is this: I’ve got a defibrillator and a pacemaker here. I have been resuscitated from the dead five times and I’ve also had this thing go off five times—totally different; they’re different things; five happens to be the common thing. The one thing I fear in life is my defibrillator going off or the resuscitation, but particularly the defibrillator. The defibrillator would go with the resuscitation now, because that is spectacular. If that went off now, I’d be flying in air. That is a horrible, horrible sensation, which is dreadful. I live in fear of that. Now, the problem is that if you’re in a stress situation—I give you an example. When I came in this morning to sit here, I could actually hear the blood running through this. Now, we calmed down—I understood that. I’ve got to avoid stress. The problem is this: it’s a bit like a circular argument. If you’re thinking about the stress, it almost creates a stress to think about the stress. So I’m worried. I get worried about this and I must at all costs—if these were genuine and I went away to write documents, and I thought that these were going to cause me stress, I wouldn’t go anywhere near them. I wouldn’t go anywhere near them. And that could very well be when I came to read the Code of Conduct—you know, “There’s too much; this is more than I remember”. And this is this and this is that. My consultant doesn’t even let me use the Underground in London because of stress.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** That’s fine. If I can move on—
Lord Laird: Yes, sorry.

The Commissioner for Standards: No problem. Can I take you to the middle of page 38, please? It’s the same point. In the middle of page 38, you’re asked whether you could find a friend who could put down questions. You replied: “But I mean the point is, I’d talk to other people who are interested, and they’d put down questions, so that’s not a problem”. What did you think would not be a problem?

Lord Laird: I think it’s just an expression. I would say to you that that comes into the category of being under pressure. If this was genuine and I had more time with these people, I would answer the questions totally differently.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right, thank you for that. Why did you not make it clear during the discussion about questions that tabling questions at the request of a commercial organisation in return for a payment—whether a peer tables the questions themselves or gets someone else to—is contrary to the Code of Conduct?

Lord Laird: Why did I not?

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes.

Colin Gowdy: Did you pick that question up, Lord Laird? Could you put the question to him again?

The Commissioner for Standards: Gladly. I think we’ve established that you raised the issue of parliamentary questions etc, so what I’m interested in is: why did you not make it clear during the discussion about tabling questions that tabling questions at the request of a commercial organisation in return for a payment—whether you table the questions yourself or you get someone else to table such questions—is contrary to the Code of Conduct?

Lord Laird: I would have thought that was fairly. Okay. Back to this point: I’m under pressure sitting here, okay, with these guys pushing me—not physically, but pushing me. I would have thought it was fairly obvious from what I was saying that I would not do that. Now, it’s not a case of that. I would have check very closely, and I read very closely the rules, but I could probably envisage a situation where they were paying me to do this, but they wanted me as well as doing this to put down a question, which had nothing to do with what they were paying me for. I’d have to check very closely to see if that affects that. Now, as I sat with them, not having recently read the rules, I would have thought that that was not an unreasonable situation, but I may on reading the rules again discover that it was an unreasonable suggestion.

The Commissioner for Standards: Thank you for that. If I could now move you on—

Colin Gowdy: Can we just stop?

The Commissioner for Standards: Please stop the tape.

[PAUSE]

The Commissioner for Standards: The tape has been resumed. If I could take you to the bottom of page 67, the female reporter asks if you could help with things like amendments and debates. You reply, “Oh yeah, yeah.” You then say that you would take their idea to the relevant office in the Lords and they would turn it into an amendment. In the middle of page 68, you said you would prefer it if someone else put the amendment down. Why did you offer to arrange for
amendments to be tabled on their behalf? Why would you prefer another peer to table the amendment?

**Lord Laird:** It’s the same sort of area we were in before. A lot of it depends on whether they were offering me money for this and whether I would accept money for this, which I wouldn’t do because, as I keep on saying, I wouldn’t go anywhere near the line. It’s very much the same type of argument as before. We’re just sort of postulating and talking round. I’m under pressure. It is a wee bit—it’s quite difficult under pressure. I’m sorry about that.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you. If I can take you to the bottom of page 68, you say, “I mean if I spoke on your behalf, I’d have to declare an interest. You can do it, I have done it, but it would be easier to get a coterie of people, supporters, and make a point that I would ask them to on this issue or that issue or whatever.” Then, at the top of page 69 you say, “I think I can do that. But that’s totally legitimate, there’s nothing incorrect about that.” Do you think it is legitimate to speak on behalf of an outside organisation that is paying you?

**Lord Laird:** Well, it depends what you are speaking about. Again, I’d have to refer back to the rules and regulations as to what the thing was, but, as I indicated, I thought that was okay. But, again, it would all have to be checked out. The “coterie of people”, that’s again getting away from this idea of just being a sort of single bandwagon, you know. A one-man bandwagon is no good.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you. Let me take you to the top of page 78. Please bear with me, as I’m going to read out, for the benefit of the tape, quite a long extract from the transcript. At the top of page 78, the following exchange took place:

“Female Reporter: If we wanted someone to speak on behalf of, say, an adaptation of the building regulations to incorporate solar glass, as an example, is that the sort of thing—would we be able to write something that we could pass to somebody and they might be able to say it?

**Lord Laird:** Well what you can do—look let’s be—we can send a—we can send a—”

For the benefit of the tape, I should say that Kevin Cahill was accompanying you to this meeting with the *Sunday Times* journalists.

“Kevin Cahill: Just a minute now, sorry, age and diabetes—

**Lord Laird:** Look, we can run debates, we can take part in debates—this is the sort of thing we can do. Let’s say you’re trying to change the building regulations, we can take part in debates, put down amendments in debates; holding debates, putting down questions, or writing to the minister.

**Female Reporter:** Writing to minister? Is that really something you can do as well?

**Lord Laird:** Yes and you must get a reply, which is government policy, and you must get it in a reasonable time.

**Female Reporter:** Really?

**Lord Laird:** And what it says is government policy.

**Female Reporter:** When you do that, do you have to declare your interest then as well?
Lord Laird: Ah, well that’s the soft underbelly. What you do is you say ‘Dear—whatever it is, Fred or whatever minister—I want to discuss such and such, I do have an interest in this topic’, that’s all you have to say.

Female Reporter: That could just be an interest.

Lord Laird: That’s it. You can ask a whole big series—that’s one of the things that you do, is ask a whole series of questions by letter.

Female Reporter: They have to reply to you?

Lord Laird: Pardon?

Female Reporter: Do they have to reply to you?

Lord Laird: Oh yeah. Oh, they must reply.

Female Reporter: Is that—

Lord Laird: Absolutely. They would be in breach of Parliament if they didn’t.

Female Reporter: Really?

Lord Laird: Yes, they must reply to me, and what they write is government policy.

Female Reporter: Wow.

Male Reporter: It’s a great way of finding out information isn’t it?

Lord Laird: Yeah.”

End of extract. Why did you offer to provide these parliamentary services to the client?

**Lord Laird:** I don’t think I offered. There are a couple of things there. First of all, as you can see from early on—I actually remember this bit—I was really struggling. That’s why you get the “Well …” I was just struggling because of what they were throwing at me. Again, I come back to this. I am saying, “We can run debates”. I am not saying that I will run debates, but we can run debates—we can do all sorts of things. A lot of the stuff might be put in non-parliamentary terms, but in terms of what you do about writing to ministers it is fairly accurate. But I’m not saying that I’m going to do that. I come back to the point that a document had to be produced and agreement had to be made as to exactly what was going to happen.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you for that. I’m now going to turn to invitations to the House of Lords. In the middle of page 26, you ask whether the investor in the solar energy scheme would like to come to the Lords. It is the first mention of the House of Lords or Parliament in the conversation and was unprompted by the journalists. Why did you make that offer?

**Lord Laird:** Just let me see that.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Sure.

**Lord Laird:** Well, again, I would refer to the Code of Conduct. What I would be thinking there is that we’ve got to show some kind of courtesy to the gentlemen. A lot of it depends on how—was there going to be a campaign, were you going to be paid and what are the rules?

**The Commissioner for Standards:** Thank you for that. Let me ask you to turn to page 39 of the transcript.

**Lord Laird:** Yes, I’ve got it.
The Commissioner for Standards: At the top of page 39, you suggest that someone from the organisation could do a lecture in the Lords about alternative fuel. Why did you suggest that?

Lord Laird: Because I—you may have read in the other bits that I run these functions on a regular basis in the Lords. I don’t know if you’re—

Colin Gowdy: It’s in the submission.

The Commissioner for Standards: Oh yes.

Lord Laird: I do that. If someone has something particularly interesting, that would be a project—you know, we’re doing a history of Germany and various other things. We’re doing something about visas and this type of stuff, which is coming up in the near future. If I get an expert speaker on any particular topic, I will try to mail him into it. That’s not necessarily that it’s got anything to do with the campaign—it’s just that I want an interesting person. We get up to 90 people now. A couple of peers might come along. A lot of researchers come along and other people from outside come along. I am, I have to say, a wee bit paranoid that here’s all these facilities in this area that we can use and people who regard the Lords with great awe, but the Lords is just a working chamber from where you, Mr Citizen, are governed. Come along, ask questions and talk to us. I’m very keen on that.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Were you aware that the rules on committee and meeting rooms state that they cannot be used to promote members’ outside interests?

Lord Laird: Yes.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. So you’re aware of that.

Lord Laird: Well, I would have guessed that. We hadn’t done that. We wouldn’t do that.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. So if the company had nominated someone to come along and talk about alternative fuel and you—no, that’s a hypothetical and I’ll not go down that one.

Colin Gowdy: It’s not fair.

The Commissioner for Standards: Let me move on, please, to page 46. In the middle of page 46, you invite the undercover journalists to the Palace of Westminster. The male reporter then says that it would be useful to take clients there. You say: “The point is, you wouldn’t call them clients. They’re just friends.” Why would you call them friends and not clients?

Lord Laird: Well, a client and a friend—if I’m getting on well with somebody or working well while dealing with somebody and I want to meet them, is it not easier that I meet them on my ground? In fact, I’ve now got to the stage where I’ll hardly go out of the place for private meetings because, if you look at these two cases here, they would have been discovered—they wouldn’t have been allowed to get through security carrying all their wires and things, okay. So I don’t go much from here to other meetings. I tend to invite people along here. But, over and above that, a lot of these guys become friends. Now, again, I’d put the usual health warning on it. I would check that again with the rules and regulations.

The Commissioner for Standards: I’ll put it to you in quite a pointed fashion, if I may. I take that argument and see what you’re saying—people may initially be in a commercial relationship and it adapts into friendship, in some cases. In some
cases, it will never develop into friendship. I take that and I understand that concept. But you’re clearly saying here, “you wouldn’t call them clients. They’re just friends.” It’s actually, I can advise you, entirely legitimate as a member of the House of Lords in the dining room if you had—let’s use an example and say you were a solicitor. You could have two of your clients in your solicitor’s practice to lunch in the House of Lords and that is entirely legitimate. If you were to book the Terrace, a meeting room or a dining room, that is where it crosses the rules and regulations laid down for the use of facilities. But I’m just interested here that you, in a sense, proactively say, “you wouldn’t call them clients. They’re just friends.”

What motivated you in that focus on nomenclature?

**Lord Laird:** As I sit here right now, six months later, I don’t know, except to say that I’m not the sharpest tool and they were putting pressure on. I actually don’t know why I used those words.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** That’s fair enough. Thank you. At the top of page 54, you say, “I find it’s easier to do, particularly with foreigners, business in the Lords, because they get carried away.” I think you have alluded to this, but can I ask you what you meant by that? What type of business do you do in the Lords?

**Lord Laird:** Well, it’s not dissimilar to the sort of thing that you mentioned a few minutes ago about taking into the dining room some guy who is interested in stuff. I am particularly interested—I think I may have put this in the presentation—in getting in jobs, particularly into Northern Ireland. If anybody is likely to show an interest—I mean, at my own expense, I will feed them and run them and do them and work them, because I think that’s what I’m there for. It is actually easier to do—it’s a fact of life that particularly foreigners find coming into the Lords, how shall we say, very engaging and very nice. They’re more receptive. Speaking as a salesman, I’m not proud of this, but that’s the way—it’s standard sales practice. But I would do that and I have done that over the years. I’ve had quite a lot of people in, particularly outside Northern Ireland—I’m always very keen on it. My greatest ambition is to bring a load of jobs to Northern Ireland, but I haven’t just got them—

**The Commissioner for Standards:** That’s fine. Thank you for that.

**Colin Gowdy:** Could you just stop there?

[PAUSE]

**The Commissioner for Standards:** If we could turn, please, to page 42 of the transcript.

**Lord Laird:** Got that.

**The Commissioner for Standards:** It is at the bottom of page 42. You refer to helping the journalists, “for a minor consideration, of course”. This is the first time anyone mentioned payment in the conversation. Talk about payment continues on to page 43, when the female reporter suggests there might be an additional payment for setting up an APPG. At the bottom of page 43 you then say:

“Lord Laird: Yeah, let me come back to you on that, as they say. If we get—you’ll understand it, because I mean we’re all very sort of crazy in our minds after the expenses scandal and all sorts of stuff. But if it gets anywhere near the red line I’ll put a flag up. Do you know what I mean?

**Female Reporter:** Yeah.
Lord Laird: What we’re talking about here is not because— All you’re simply doing, really, is using the services of a public relations guy who happens to be in the Lords. It’s like going to a dentist who happens to be in the Lords”.

What did you mean by that?

Lord Laird: Again, this is me not necessarily thinking about what they were going to talk about. I talked in this document, and I was thinking—I wasn’t in good shape like I was [unclear] I was in better shape [unclear]. But I did talk in this about we should deal with architects and other people. Okay, so, I was envisaging this climate of opinion-type campaign that I talk about. Okay? Sorry, I have lost it—this is embarrassing.

The Commissioner for Standards: No, please take your time.

Lord Laird: But it still underlines what I am saying. I will not go anywhere near the red line or whatever—you know, the line—and I’ll put up a flag if I think things are going out of—I am still a wee bit lost. Sorry.

The Commissioner for Standards: That is all right. If I can maybe refresh: it is at the bottom of page 42. It is your penultimate contribution. You say at the end of that paragraph, or input: “but I like the sort of challenge you talk about and I’d like to be able to help you guys, for a minor consideration, of course”.

Lord Laird: Well, that was me—"for a consideration” is one of the sorts of jokey phrases we use in the trade. But having said that, I don’t particularly—look, I have given up a lot. I have given up another career to come here, okay, and therefore you know, if somebody is going to pay me for doing something that is legitimate and outside the scheme of Parliament, and it’s a commercial organisation, not a charity, I think it is not unreasonable for me to say, “For a minor consideration”. I could require large lumps of—they talk astronomical, but it is just rubbish. I think that’s not unreasonable. It is like I talk about the dentist: a dentist does not give up being a dentist because he’s a member of the Lords. So a PR guy with a particular view, a very, very strong view that he has lectured about, and does lecture—well, I haven’t recently lectured, but did lecture—about how things happen. I have very strong opinions about the sort of lobbying that goes on around here. Very strong. I just think, with respect, that it is rubbish. I think a better way is the climate of opinion thing. I feel very strongly about that. If I had an opportunity to have a say in a campaign and direct a few things in a campaign, people who believe what I was suggesting, I would find that quite stimulating, to be quite blunt. But again, it’s got to be checked against, because I haven’t dealt in these things for years. They would have to be checked against the Code.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Thank you for that. I am now going to move on to declaring the interest. If I could ask you to refer to the bottom of page 69, it is about a third of the way up the page. The female reporter asks who you would declare in the Register of Lords’ Interests: Coulton & Goldie—which is the name that the Sunday Times journalists were operating under—or the client. On page 70, you say: “I’d just declare you”. Were you aware of the requirement for peers to register all clients to which they provide personal services? If so, did you think you would not be providing personal services to the South Korean solar company?

Lord Laird: I didn’t know. I didn’t know what. Also, I was not very clear in whether—that’s why, again, I’ve got to produce the document, to be quite blunt about the thing, and was not very clear when I was talking about this. It put me
under a bit of pressure but I was not very clear what the rules and regulations were.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. That’s answered that. Thank you. I’m now going to move on to the e-mails that were circulated after the meeting.

Lord Laird: Could I just make one point?

The Commissioner for Standards: Please, yes.

Lord Laird: In e-mails before the meeting—sorry, in scripts of telephone conversations—there’s what I regard as a significant telephone, two telephone conversations which they refuse to give me the transcripts of. The very significant one is the one from Kevin Cahill to what turned out to be the Sunday Times people when he explained about my health, the state of my health, okay? They will not give us a transcript of that. At least I haven’t got it. If you have it, I haven’t. I can’t find it.

The Commissioner for Standards: You’re saying there are two telephone conversations—

Lord Laird: Mine was pretty mundane, but the one to Kevin, where he explained about my condition of health—because he is also partly explaining why he wanted to come, or why I wanted him to come. So he left them in no doubt as to what my state of health was, and that is actually, if I could say this to you—

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes.

Lord Laird: That is one of the things that really peeves me a wee bit, if you don’t mind—that they knew my state of health but laboured on to get their headline.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. I’ve noted that. I’m grateful for that. I’ve moved on to the e-mails after the meeting. On Tuesday 21 May, the day after your lunch, Robyn Fox e-mailed you to say that Coulton & Goldie were no longer in a position to offer you the work. On Friday 24 May at 7.20 am Kevin Cahill e-mailed the journalists referring to the criminal offences of fraudulently misrepresenting themselves as a fictitious Swiss company and of attempting to bribe Members of Parliament. At 7.58 am on 24 May Mr Cahill sent a further e-mail suggesting that you knew on Friday 17 May that Coulton & Goldie did not exist. He said that by the morning of Monday 20 May you knew the phone and website were false. He said you decided to go ahead with the lunch at the Ivy in order to get a free lunch and obtain formal evidence of the entrapment. Did you know it was a scam before the lunch took place?

Lord Laird: No. I knew that, okay, Kevin has got a lot of contacts in Switzerland, and he checked out those contacts in Switzerland—they’re Swiss, a Zurich address, I think. The address didn’t actually [unclear] but the person who—his contact in Zurich—said, “Look, in Switzerland that doesn’t actually mean to say that the thing doesn’t exist”. But it certainly put a flag up. By the time I left the lunch, the only thing I wanted to do was to consult with Kevin very quickly, because I was getting pretty convinced that this was stinking.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. My understanding is that you very fairly said no, you didn’t know it was a scam. I think you’ve then gone on to say that Kevin Cahill was carrying out certain checks—

Lord Laird: Yes.

The Commissioner for Standards: But because they didn’t come up, shall we say, positive, that doesn’t necessarily indicate that things were wrong.
Lord Laird: No, but it did indicate that—it underlined why I should bring Kevin.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right.

Lord Laird: If there’s a need to underline why I brought Kevin.

The Commissioner for Standards: That’s fine. We’ve got Kevin Cahill in the e-mails saying he knew it was a scam, but you just immediately responded saying you didn’t know it was a scam. There seems to be a disparity there.

Lord Laird: I think that he felt it was a scam, but I think he has—he took it very badly. Because he, don’t forget, is a former employee of the Sunday Times and the Insight team. He took it very badly and wrote those e-mails, which I knew nothing about until he had written them.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. So you knew nothing about his e-mails.

Lord Laird: No, not in advance. I knew that he was going to e-mail but I didn’t know what he was going to say. And I think he was in, let us say, a bit of a temper about it. I don’t want to be—

The Commissioner for Standards: No.

Lord Laird: He wasn’t in the best of form or, as they say around here, best pleased.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. What you are saying is that Kevin Cahill sent e-mails; you weren’t aware of them; but when you had the lunch, you weren’t aware it was a scam?

Lord Laird: As I say, when I walked away from it, I was pretty certain that there was something rotten. But for an incident [unclear].

The Commissioner for Standards: When you walked away, you had—

Lord Laird: I could—I remember going down the aisle. We were going down the aisle together to the Ivy and I could hardly wait to get him down the aisle far enough away from hearing the voices so that I could, you know. I could hardly wait. We got a taxi and came back down here. I can’t remember where I got out of the taxi at that stage because I only live around the corner but I had a splitting headache at that stage with the stress. He was quite clear in his mind that it was a scam. In fact he was—but then, you see, he had been talking to the male, and they had been talking about their universities, which I could only hear a bit of. The guy claimed that he had been to a university—

The Commissioner for Standards: I have gone through the transcripts so I am well aware. “Do you remember Professor Green. Aha. There was never a Professor Green.” I am conscious that there was this questioning going on.

Lord Laird: But the point is that he was much in a better position to believe there was a scam than I was, okay?

Colin Gowdy: Lord Laird has answered that for you, hasn’t he?

The Commissioner for Standards: Yes.

Lord Laird: I was going to show you the layout of the table, but that’s okay.

The Commissioner for Standards: I am happy with that. Lord Laird, they’re the end of the questions that I wanted to put to you. Can I ask, Nick, are there any points that you feel I’ve overlooked that you feel we should put.

Nicolas Besly: No, thank you.
The Commissioner for Standards: That’s the end as far as I’m concerned. Please be aware you’re not obliged in the sense you don’t need to add anything, but equally, if you wanted to say something, I would be more than happy to have it on the record. But there’s the end of my questions.

Lord Laird: There was that strange incident at the very end that I cannot account for, where there’s an incident that is not on that tape. Not even on that video of the tape. But I remember it, and so does Kevin.

The Commissioner for Standards: Sorry, can I ask, whatever this incident is, is it relevant to an allegation that you’ve breached the Code?

Lord Laird: Yes.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right.

Lord Laird: It’s relevant to an allegation. In the Sunday Times they said they’d offered me and I’d accepted £12,000—12 whatever it is—

Colin Gowdy: £120,000.

Lord Laird: £120,000 a year.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right.

Lord Laird: The only place where that was offered was in that last bit.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right.

Lord Laird: I have to tell you that that is the thing that frightened me most of all. I think there was a sort of look of surprise on my face where she identified that the game was up. It is hard for other guys who are not professional PR guys but she brought—you’ve read the statement, you’ve read my bit. That’s what I remember. I can remember standing up and all the stuff. The words at the beginning and the end of what I claimed she said could be modified to mean something slightly different. But she definitely offered me £10,000 a month to carry out what they wanted. Okay? I was absolutely away with it. Because to me that was—that was the most, I mean, you know, I’ve spent a lifetime in this business, reared my kids into all this. That was outrageous.

The Commissioner for Standards: I take it that that is not a standard fee in the PR world.

Lord Laird: I think that would be a fair assumption. Not only that but the way it was made. You just don’t lean over a table and say, “You do realise we are offering it”. But the only place that actually appears is in the paper.

The Commissioner for Standards: Right. Thank you for that.

Colin Gowdy: Just a second. Can you put that off?

[PAUSE]

The Commissioner for Standards: Thank you for that. I am now going to terminate the transcript as that is the end of the interview.
ANNEX 3: APPEAL BY LORD LAIRD ON THE FINDINGS OF THE REPORT ("THE REPORT") BY THE HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS ISSUED ON 19 NOVEMBER 2013

The Report deals with a number of issues. The findings against me all relate to an alleged breach by me in three instances of paragraph 8(b) of the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords. For ease of reference, this is:-

“Members of the House …

(b) should act always on their personal honour.”

Paragraph 7 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct makes it clear that there is no fixed definition of the term “personal honour.” Personal honour is “…a matter for individual Members subject to the sense and culture of the House as a whole.”

Background

At paragraph 25 of the Report, reference is made to certain remarks attributed to me. I note that it is readily conceded that “those remarks did not and could not constitute a breach of the Code”. There is a finding “…it would be remiss of me if I did not highlight that these remarks reflect no credit on Lord Laird.” Such a statement is irrelevant to the issues and unfairly prejudicial of me and amount to the perception of bias against me.

The substantive findings in the Report are based on a value judgment. That judgment must, of necessity, be coloured by what is found at paragraph 25 and taints the substantive findings in the Report.

Allegation about creating an ad-hoc group consequent upon the Sunday Times interview

This states:—

“I believe there is sufficient strong evidence for me to find that Lord Laird demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would involve him helping to create an all-party group in return for payment by C & G.”

The evidence that has been adduced in the report shows quite clearly my total opposition to the creation of an all-party group. In those circumstances, the evidence points to the conclusion that I would not have negotiated an agreement.

However, the thrust of the finding is that I demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement. That statement flies in the face of the evidence. The evidence simply sets out in general terms what is involved in an APG. It does not show any willingness to negotiate.

The paragraph then contains the additional words “which would involve him helping to create an all-party group for payment by C & G.”

However, paragraph 39 makes it clear that there was no agreement to accept payment in return for providing the parliamentary service of helping create an all-party group.

Paragraphs 38 and 39 read together are inconsistent. Payment was not mentioned.

Paragraph 30 states:—

“However, I believe that the creation of an APG at the behest of a commercial organisation in return for payment or with reward is at variance with the concept
of personal honour.” It is of some significance that paragraph 38 does not contain any reference to “reward”.

Taken as a whole, the gravamen of the allegation is the acceptance by me of payment or other reward. Nowhere in the evidence is there any mention of payment or other reward being made to me for helping to set up an APG.

At paragraph 33, it is recorded:—

“There is a lot of money involved … because you’ve got to pay for a lot of these guys (my emphasis) to go out there…”

This is a reference to the payment of the necessary expenses of members of the group. In no way could just a statement be construed as a payment or reward to me for helping to provide the parliamentary service of setting up an APG.

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*Allegation about the creating of an all-party group consequent upon the Panorama Report*

Paragraphs 66 to 79 deal with the allegation of creating an APG consequent upon the Panorama broadcast. The conclusion drawn by the Commission is in terms identical to those findings made in connection with the Sunday Times article.

There is absolutely no evidence to show that I expressed a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement for payment or reward. The only reference to payment is the reference to the cost of setting up an APG. This is not a reference to a payment or reward for me.

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*Allegation about the provision of parliamentary services consequent upon the Parliamentary Report*

The substance of this allegation is found at paragraph 72. This is in terms:—

“The comments above taken as a whole create a distinct picture that if he were retained by the consultant, Lord Laird would be willing to provide parliamentary services to them or their clients. This seems to me sufficiently strong evidence to find that Lord Laird demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement that would involve the provisions of parliamentary services in return for payment or other reward.”

The relevant extracts from the Sunday Times interview are set out at paragraphs 41 to 48 inclusive. These extracts do nothing more than set out what is the “description of a role of a peer” but subject to further scrutiny of the relevant rules.

I would refer to pages 172 and 173 of the Report. These deal with the only times that payment or reward is mentioned. My response is quite clear: I would not countenance any such payment.

There is no evidence whatsoever to support the contention that I “demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement that would involve the provision of parliamentary services for payment or other reward”. In respect of all three allegations, I would draw attention to paragraph 4 on page 174 where I state:—

“In short in neither case was there a contract; nor was there a memorandum to lead to a contract. Nor was there a verbal agreement as to what such memorandum, or contract should contain. There was simply an exploratory and at times rather muddled conversation as to what such a contract, if it ever did materialise, might properly (my
emphasis) contain. Such a conversation must be permissible under the rules how otherwise could one establish legitimate parameters as is encouraged by paragraph 20 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct”.

In short, the finding that I demonstrated a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would involve me helping to create an all-party group in return for payment or other reward has not been made out.

Sanction

In the event that the Committee does not uphold my appeal in respect of the findings, I also appeal against the sanction.

While there are expressed to be three separate findings, they are, to all intents and purposes, the one finding. To penalise me on three counts is disproportionate and unfair.

No person benefitted in any way from the two “scams” investigated.

The imposition of the sanction does not take into account in any way my medical conditions and how they contribute to the manner in which I express myself. It does not take into account my impeccable record of service to the House.

I have assisted the Commissioner comprehensively in his inquiry.

For the above reasons, the sanction, in my respectful submission, should be a reprimand.

Lord Laird

1 December 2013
Transcript of evidence taken before The Select Committee for Privileges and Conduct 9 December 2013

Members present

Lord Sewel (Chairman)
Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Lord Bassam of Brighton
Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville
Lord Eames
Lord Hill of Oareford
Lord Laming
Lord Mackay of Clashfern
Lord Newby
Baroness Royall of Blaisdon
Baroness Scotland of Asthal
Lord Scott of Foscote
Lord Wallace of Tankerness

Also present: Colin Gowdy, Lord Laird’s solicitor

Examination of Witness

Lord Laird

Q1. The Chairman: Good morning, Lord Laird, thank you for attending. This is a meeting of the Privileges and Conduct Committee to hear your appeal against both the substance of the Commissioner’s findings and the Sub-Committee on Lords’ Conduct’s recommendation as to sanction.

Let me explain to you the format of the meeting. First, I will ask you whether you wish to make a general opening statement covering the main matters. There will then be an opportunity for Members of the Committee to ask you questions, which will be on the substance of the Commissioner’s findings. You will then have the opportunity to make any comment on that part of the proceedings. I will then proceed to give you an opportunity to make a statement on the sanction that the Sub-Committee has recommended and you will have a final opportunity to make any comments that you would wish to make that you may not have had the opportunity to make during the course of the meeting.

I appreciate that you have brought with you your solicitor, who is entitled to attend, as you know. However, let me read out part of paragraph 117 of the Guide to the code, which states: “If they choose”—”they” are Peers who are subject to investigation—”to bring a colleague, friend or adviser, they are free to consult him or her off the record, but will be expected to answer for themselves (and not through the friend or adviser) any question put to them”. We will proceed on that basis. Lord Laird, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Lord Laird: My Lord Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity to say a few words. I am very pleased and proud to be a Member of the House of Lords. I have been here for 14 and a half years. When I came here, I felt that I could contribute to working on behalf of the community I come from and of the country, using whatever skills I had. I wanted to be a day-to-day Member of this House, a very regular attender, taking an interest in things. I am disappointed that I am causing the inconvenience that I am causing to everybody who is here today. I appreciate that you are all giving up time. I am just sorry that this has been necessary. I would like to make a few points about the Commissioner’s remarks. I want to put that in...
the context of my state of health, which is not great and was recognised by the House as such, because the House affords me a taxi to drive to and from my apartment, which is not that far from here, and to go back at lunchtime or anytime in the afternoon to take a rest, or whenever the problems happen to be.

There are issues I want to draw to your attention which I think have a bearing on these proceedings. As you will note in the medical documents, by reason of the fact that I was born after 28 weeks, I am heavily dyslexic to the extent that I had a somewhat unusual childhood, where I was, believe it or not, the smallest of the class at junior school, was heavily bullied and ended up having very low self-esteem, a negative personality and being depressed. Three years ago I wrote about this in a book *A Struggle to be Heard*, and discussed both my dyslexia and my depression. My depression really took off big time in 1970. At the age of 25 I became a Member of the Northern Ireland Parliament for an inner-city constituency in Belfast. To put it quite curtly, I was succeeding my father who perhaps had more ambition. That was at the start of the Troubles in Belfast. I felt totally responsible for the area I represented. I could not understand what was going on. You got no guidance or help. You just had to take the job yourself. It came to a head in a place called Hope Street in Belfast. The IRA let off a bomb that destroyed, in some way, 250 houses in my constituency. My black mood really took off. It took me years to get over that period of feeling totally impotent, totally down and not able to offer support and help to people who, through no fault other than that they were living in the wrong place, were being mucked about by the civil disorder. At that stage, the depression needed medical attention, which it got. But I have had it all the days of my life. One of the things I do, which is a wee bit unfortunate, is to try and lessen stress—the big fear in my life is stress—by trying to create a situation around me not only for the people who help me, but to try and create an atmosphere around me which may be amusing; that may be my opinion, and I may be wrong in this. Sorry, I am losing my place.

Sorry, I am lost for words.

I discovered, particularly at that junior school, that you can defuse a bullying situation by trying to be funny. Unfortunately, this has probably run away a bit with me. I spend a lot of time trying to make sure that I am use people and leave them with an impression of who I am. I am very interested in communication. It was, for a vast part of my life, the largest profession that I was in. I have always, let us say, taken the advice of Enoch Powell who said that anybody who wants to be a politician has to be an actor. You have to leave people in a situation where they will never forget that you called at the door or you met them in the street. That is kind of a thing that I have done. This leads me to being very stressed out and to have trouble with stress. I had a heart attack in 2007, which was pretty severe. To be honest with you, I did not know that I had had a heart attack; I went about my normal business for nearly 24 hours before I reported to the local hospital. I had quite a number of disappointing and difficult episodes there, but stress is the one thing that brings on—Sorry, I am slightly under it now. I have forgotten the word. Stress brings on heavy depression, so I have to avoid it at all costs. On occasions I have been taken from this building to St Thomas’s Hospital, suffering from stress, to have my heart checked. I have gone through a number of episodes, including one when I collapsed in the car park out there and lay in the gutter for a while, while people climbed over me to get to a meeting in the Cholmondeley Room.

That is by the by. The point is that I suffer heavily from stress, which has got infinitely worse since my heart attack, and probably due to my age as well. I do not speak in the House any more. I may never speak in the House again. I do other
tasks which are easier. I took part in a debate in the Moses Room last year and I lost it completely. As anybody here who was there will know, I lost it completely: I lost who I was and everything about it. I do not want that to happen in the Chamber.

I am currently on a course to try and rectify or improve the situation. I think that might put me back a wee bit on that course again. But for one who used to speak regularly and take on an awful lot of stuff, I do not speak now. I have not spoken during this calendar year in the Chamber, and I have no plans to speak.

I have forgotten where I am. Could I have a few minutes?

**The Chairman:** Five minutes.

[Pause]

Will you identify your solicitor, please?

**Colin Gowdy:** My name is Colin Gowdy.

**Lord Laird:** I am sorry about being long-winded, but the point is that my medical condition is explained in detail in two reports that you should have copies of, from Professor Jennifer Adgey and Dr Harbinson. They give a fairly good explanation. I have never been in the situation before, while a Member of this House, that I was in during these interviews that turned out to be scams.

I was invited along, as I thought, to discuss public relations. I think that my medical condition had an effect on those interviews. In the Commissioner for Standards' finding—

I think that is me finished with my opening statement.

**The Chairman:** I want to give you every opportunity to say what you want to say, Lord Laird, and we have your written appeal before us. Am I correct in concluding that that is the essence of the case you wish to make and you do not think it necessary to add to it?

**Lord Laird:** Yes.

**The Chairman:** Fine. Thank you. The next stage is for Members to put questions.

**Q2. Lord Laming:** Lord Laird, you have dealt extensively with your medical condition, but you will understand that the Committee wants to move on to the complaints against you and the Commissioner's findings. I shall take you first to paragraph 25 of the Commissioner's report, which starts on page 11. It may be easier if I read out the paragraph. “In addition to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct, The Sunday Times reported certain other comments made by Lord Laird. In particular, having said that the female reporter starts off ‘with the MPs a couple of steps ahead of everyone else, because you're an attractive female’, Lord Laird said, ‘the trouble is in the Lords, they tend to be homosexuals.’ He then told a joke about the debates in the House of Lords which ended with: ‘Homosexuals and foxes are the only thing that fill the bloody place.’ These remarks did not and could not constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and I therefore did not question Lord Laird about them. However, it would be remiss of me if I did not simply highlight that these remarks reflect no credit on Lord Laird”. In your appeal, Lord Laird—this is what I want you to clarify—you refer to paragraph 25. You rightly repeat that the remarks did not constitute a breach of the code, but you go on to say, “Such a statement is irrelevant to the issues and unfairly
prejudicial of me and amounts to the perception of bias against me”. Will you say something about that?

**Lord Laird:** In the context of the purpose of this Committee meeting and the findings of the Commissioner about breaches of the code, the comments are irrelevant. They are unfortunate, but they are irrelevant.

**Lord Laming:** They are unfortunate, but they are irrelevant?

**Lord Laird:** They are unfortunate in the way they are reported here.

**Lord Laming:** Lord Laird, to press you a little further on that, you state that they demonstrate prejudice and bias against you. Do you believe that the Commissioner’s report is biased against you?

**Lord Laird:** It should not have said that.

**Lord Laming:** Let me ask you the question. Do you believe that the Commissioner’s report was biased against you?

**Lord Laird:** From a reading of this, I do think it was.

**Lord Laming:** Are you referring only to those words or to the whole report?

**Lord Laird:** I think that, in a sense, this sets the tone. I think it is an unfortunate remark he made.

**Lord Laming:** The Committee could reasonably conclude from that that you believe that the Commissioner’s report was biased against you?

**Lord Laird:** I think there is a level of bias in there. Depending, of course, on how it is interpreted.

**Lord Laming:** Say the last bit again—I did not catch it.

**Lord Laird:** It depends on how the evidence is interpreted.

**Lord Laming:** The significant thing I am trying to ask is: do you believe that the Commissioner was biased in his investigation?

**Lord Laird:** When you come down to the other sections, my view is that he has taken conclusions for which there is no evidence.

**Lord Laming:** That is quite a serious statement, Lord Laird. Do you stand by it?

**Lord Laird:** Yes.

**Q3. Lord Hill of Oareford:** Lord Laird, talking about the evidence, we need to ask you a few questions about the allegation that you were prepared to work to set up an all-party group. Obviously I have read your appeal and read the exchanges between you and the Commissioner very carefully where you I think rightly point out that throughout the transcript with the undercover reporters you make it clear that you do not think setting up an all-party group is a good idea; you rely on that in your appeal in terms of saying that you were very clear throughout the interview that you did not think setting up an all-party group was a good idea. I think that is clear from the transcript. It struck me though, on reading it, that that was a tactical argument. You did not think it would be a sensible thing to set up an all-party group for the conduct of the campaign and did not formulate a principled argument that you would not be involved in setting up an all-party group. Would you like to comment on that distinction? Do you accept the difference between a tactical argument, which you are very clear about—”You shouldn’t do this”—and a principled argument, “You shouldn’t do this and I shouldn’t have anything to do with setting up an all-party group”?
**Lord Laird:** I actually think it is a principled thing. I do not think that APPGs are successful. I take a totally different view on trying to do things. I talk about the creation of a climate of opinion. It is a topic that I used to lecture heavily on at the University of Ulster. It is what I believe a whole public relations campaign is. What you are trying to do is create outside in the community, whatever the subject happens to be, a situation where a topic is well accepted and well known, working on the basis that, let us say, people like MPs—and to a certain extent Peers, but particularly MPs—are very susceptible to what is being said to them in their own surgeries or just walking down the street. If a topic becomes current, there is likely to be some activity or some action taken in this Parliament building, rather than the concept, which I totally disagree with, of talking to some Minister or civil servant and trying to use the old school tie or something. I do not think it is successful. I do not think it is good. It is not what this place should be all about. This place should react to what people outside require. What you do is go outside and try to create the climate of opinion,

**Lord Hill of Oareford:** What about the fact that it is not within our rules to set up an all-party group in exchange for commercial advantage? That is the point I think you do not make clear. I understand the point that you do not think it is a good idea tactically, but the whole point is that this is not something that we are supposed to do. I did not see anywhere you saying, “That is not something that I could do. It is against our rules and it is not something I would be involved with”.

**Lord Laird:** You did not see in this document here anything that talks about reward or payment for doing that. You have to remember that this was a very preliminary discussion—a discussion about a discussion, even. We were not into detailed discussion. In both transcripts, you will find that I continually made the point, including in the paragraphs concerned here, that the one thing I would not do is cross the line. I would not break the rules.

**Lord Hill of Oareford:** So you feel you did not know the rules on all-party groups.

**Lord Laird:** The point is that at the time the rules were issued, I read them along with everybody else and signed the document. I am dyslexic. I cannot be expected to know every jot and tittle that is in the rules. What I would do, were I back in the public relations business, is to take all the material away and work out a scheme—I have outlined how I would do this in the document—which has probably been recognised as a fair summary of how you would go about putting together a PR campaign if you are going to be involved. What was the other point you made?

**Lord Hill of Oareford:** I am trying to establish that you accept that you were not clear with them about your lack of willingness to be involved in setting up an all-party group. It is perfectly possible, looking at the transcript, to see why they
would have formed the view that you were prepared to become involved in setting up an all-party group.

**Lord Laird:** I want to make two points. One is that I am not as precise in expressing myself when under pressure, certainly not as precise as I used to be. I used to think that I was very precise, but I am not. That was one of the reasons, had I not had other reasons anyway, that I would not have accepted or been party to any discussions or agreements as a result of those meetings. I did not know that on that occasion they were going to discuss with me issues that required me to bring a copy of the rules or somebody with me. I would not read the rules myself. What I would do, and what I have done for instance with all this material, is always get somebody to read it for me and tell me what is in it. If you are dyslexic like me, you are quite able to read the rules and read them the wrong way round. It is a very complicated business. I do not know if anyone else here is dyslexic, but I do not read phonetically; I read by visually knowing a word, not by how you pronounce it. A new word is a total mystery to me, a total mystery.

**Lord Hill of Oareford:** Are you saying in essence that you knew the rules or that you did not know the rules?

**Lord Laird:** I knew the generality, absolutely. I knew the generality. That is why, do not forget, when I thought that either party was getting near that borderline, I kept on saying, “Look, I will not be party to this”. As in the PR business, you would check it very closely and very carefully. You would agree the minute detail of what you were going to do. As a result of my experiences in the last number of years—you will see this again from the medical reports—I have lost some memory. I cannot trust myself too much on memory now. It is a function of age and the whole malaise that I get into. It is not unreasonable to say to these guys, “I want to go away; if necessary, I want to read the rules”. Well, I said “read the rules”, although in my case I would get the rules read to me. I have people who read these things very carefully for me.

Q4. Baroness Anelay of St Johns: I shall follow up on the APPG issue and the interviews carried out on behalf of the *Sunday Times*. I refer you to your own appeal document, at the bottom of page 2, and I shall try to paint a clearer picture as to where we have reached. Are you saying that, throughout this, from your point of view, there would only be a breach of the rules if you had physically taken some payment or reward for setting up the APPG? Is that what I can infer from those two paragraphs of your appeal document? You are saying, “If I didn’t take something, it is fine; if I had taken something, it is not fine”?

**Lord Laird:** Will you give me a second?

Would it be your suggestion that, when I talked about a lot of money, some of it would come my way?

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** No, I am not jumping to that conclusion at all. I am trying to find out what you consider to be the rules about setting up APGs. In
other words, are you suggesting, from everything you say, that you would only be breaking the rules in helping to set up an APG if you had already taken the money—if, by the time we were dealing with all this, you had taken money or reward?

**Lord Laird:** But there is no suggestion that I was going to take any reward or payment.

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** Are you saying, therefore, that you would have worked for this fake company—we now know it was fake—without payment or reward?

**Lord Laird:** Yes, I could have. I did, actually, in both cases, give them what I regarded as a number of useful public relations ideas. I do not have the capability of doing a full day’s work, which is why I have that particular agreement with the Clerk of the Parliaments’ Office, but I like to be kept involved, to be quite blunt, and I like putting forward ideas and seeing how those ideas do in communication. I was even quite excited about some of the ideas I put forward. It was not a case of money. I would have given them advice—

I believe that one of the jobs that I have—and I am, perhaps, arrogant enough to think that I have done it successfully for a length of time—is to make the House of Lords relevant to the people I deal with. I find that there is a bit of a barrier between us, a sort of them and us. People come to me regularly with all sorts of problems and things, perhaps not down to the constituency level, but I certainly get a lot of people coming with ideas or problems, and I cannot think of anybody who has come to me whom I have turned away, refused to talk to or refused to help, but it is not for money. It is just ideas; if they appeal to me, I would be quite happy. Money was not particularly important. The money I am referring to there is the money to run an APG. From my very limited experience of APGs, it is one of the reasons I do not particularly like them. I am sorry if that was a bit long.

**Q5. Lord Newby:** Let us move on to your conversation with the “Panorama” people. On page 3 of your appeal, you say that there is no evidence that you demonstrated “a clear willingness to negotiate an agreement which would involve me helping to create an all-party group in return for payment or other reward” by the consultancy with whom you were having the conversation. How does that square with the statement quoted in paragraph 69 of the Commissioner’s report, on page 23, where you say, “if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one with a bow on it”?

**Lord Laird:** I was trying to be funny to somebody who I thought was in the same profession as me. In both cases they identified themselves as being in the same trade as me and for a while we talked a little bit of the same language. I was trying to build bridges. It may be incorrect on my part, but in order to build bridges and to get across to somebody I do not know terribly well I tend to try to be humorous or to use this type of cartoon language. It helps me greatly. It may not help the other person and I am sorry about that.

**Lord Newby:** But in the PR business when you use the phrase “the client”, the assumption is, is it not, that you have a commercial relationship with somebody?

**Lord Laird:** Well, he did. That is what I was talking about. It was his client.

**Lord Newby:** But you said, “if the client wants an APPG we’ll get him one”. You are saying that you did not envisage, when you said that, that you would have a client relationship with either the Fijians directly or the public relations company.

**Lord Laird:** Sorry, would you mind just saying that again, please?
Lord Newby: When you use the phrase I just quoted, are you saying that you did not envisage that you would have a formal relationship with either the PR company or the Fijians?

Lord Laird: Will you just repeat that?

Lord Newby: You are saying that you did not envisage being, yourself, in a client relationship with the PR company.

Lord Laird: Not necessarily. Which one are we talking about?

Lord Newby: The Fijians.

Lord Laird: The Fijians? Not necessarily. Do not forget that I had already, by that stage, given them ideas that I think a number of PR guys would have sold for quite a lot of money. I had given them ideas off the top of my head. Those need to be polished and refined, but I find that that actually is my job—sorry, this was my job, this is how I fed my family, paid the rent and stuff. I find it very interesting, the concept of how to put together a message, as a job. To be blunt, I found the discussion of these things quite stimulating, quite interesting. I was thinking of ideas for all the things we could do and I had already given him ideas, without any suggestion of payment, which other PR guys would have charged an awful lot of money for. I had just given them to him, so I was not terribly worried, to be quite blunt. I was more interested in seeing how—

I took his story about Fiji and I was very interested to be involved in a bit of international public relations. I was in it to see how the chemistry would work, to put that back on the rails again. That would be more interesting to me than anything else. I would probably not have ended up working for them. First, I cannot travel. Well, I can travel in Europe, but I cannot travel long distance. I could not have gone to Fiji and that would have been an important part of a relationship with a client, to go and visit him, or he would think you are lacking in understanding. I cannot travel because, as you know, I have a pacemaker and a defibrillator. Sorry—you have read all that. I do go on a bit. I apologise.

Q6. Lord Eames: Lord Laird, it is obvious that you are under a great deal of strain. I want you to think very carefully about what I am going to ask you. It refers back to page 3 of your appeal document and your claim that there is no evidence to show that you demonstrated a clear willingness to accept monetary reward. In fact, you went so far in your appeal as to say that no there was no question of money being mentioned at that level. I want to be clear in my mind about this, and my colleagues would like clarity. Is it your suggestion that you would have been prepared to work for this make-believe consultancy without receiving money or other reward if it was something that obviously enthused or interested you?

Lord Laird: Yes.

Lord Eames: You would have been prepared to work at that level, and you were not talking about monetary reward?

Lord Laird: The key word there is “work”. I would have been keen to have been consulted on that basis. I like to work on ideas. That is what I think I am: an ideas man. To put it very clearly, I would have been more interested to be involved in putting the experiment together and seeing how it worked, and hoping it did work, rather than making any money.

Lord Eames: And you would say in support of your appeal that this was evidence that you were not simply in it for the money.
**Lord Laird:** Far from it.

**Lord Eames:** You agree with what I have just said?

**Lord Laird:** Absolutely, yes.

**Lord Eames:** Any reference in part of the paperwork we have where you say, for example, “If this comes to pass, you are talking about £2,000 or something like that”, is ancillary to the point that you would want to make: you were not in it for the money.

**Lord Laird:** That, I think, refers to Fiji again.

**Lord Eames:** Yes. It was specifically mentioned.

**Lord Laird:** Oh yes, I agree with you. In the Fiji case, they were continually saying that they wanted to know how much I would charge. To be honest with you, that is a very small fee in public relations terms for that type of work; it is more a nominal type of thing. I would not be terribly worried about it, but they asked about my charges and I gave them an idea.

In the other case, do not forget I was offered a six-figure sum, which I turned down without even consideration. I would not be a party to it.

**Lord Eames:** Are you again telling me that you would have been prepared to work in this situation without money?

**Lord Laird:** As long as it did not break the rules, which was quite clearly said and specified, and was outside Parliament. Sorry I am getting lost. One of those good ideas was to do with rugby.

**Lord Eames:** The point that I want to make absolutely clear, and I want you to make clear to me, is that this was a possibility and that you would have worked even without money if there has been enthusiasm for and interest in it.

**Lord Laird:** That is exactly the position.

Q7. **Lord Scott of Foscote:** Lord Laird, in the report of the interview which you had with these characters who came to see you, on page 73 of the bundle the lady described as “female reporter” said to you, “Do you have clients?” The answer you gave was, “I am chairman of the Earth Foundation. I am chairman of that advisory board. I mean, that’s the sort of—I am a retired PR guy, but”, you went on, “I like the sort of challenge you”—i.e. the people you were talking to—”talk about. I would like to be able to help you guys, for a minor consideration of course”. What was meant by “a minor consideration”?

**Lord Laird:** They talked continually about money, as you will read from the transcript. The chairmanship of, let us say, the Earth Foundation had nothing whatever to do with anything in this building. They kept on talking money to me, and I was simply batting the ball back from that. It would be a minor consideration.

**Lord Scott of Foscote:** What would you call a minor consideration, for example?

**Lord Laird:** £1,000 a month.

**Lord Scott of Foscote:** £1,000 a month?

**Lord Laird:** Yes. That is what I have done. I do very little of this, to be quite honest with you, but that is what I would charge anybody for that sort of thing. That sort of covers your expenses and keeps you moving about.
Q8. Baroness Royall of Blaisdon: Lord Laird, I now take you to paragraphs 41 to 48 of the Commissioner’s report, in which you say that the extracts of your conversations with the undercover Sunday Times people that are quoted in those paragraphs are no more than a description of the role of a Peer. You go into quite a lot of detail about tabling Questions, and you say that there is a department in the Lords where you can seek advice in order to table Questions, etc. But then you also say, which disturbs me, that if you had a specific interest in an issue, you would get other people in the Lords to put down Questions for you. You suggest that there is a sort of “coterie of people, supporters” who you would get to put down Questions for you. If you have little or no pecuniary interest in a company that you might be representing, I wonder why you would find it necessary to ask colleagues in the House to table Questions on your behalf. I accept, of course, that you categorically state all the time that you have to be careful and you would not cross the line, etc., but I am interested to know why you would wish to ask other people to put down Questions for you.

Lord Laird: If you are involved, particularly in Written Questions, you get to know the people who are interested in other topics and topics that are similar to yours, or at least that you know a wee bit about—if you are interested. This is something that I got into as a Northern Ireland MP: what information can you get from the use of a Written Question? If there is an issue on which I can see that a Question would get a lead, I would be very quick to mention it to the person who is leading on it. That is not the proper term; I mean the person who is taking a particular interest. I would check this. I would discuss it on a semi-regular basis, whenever you meet them or when something is coming up. Someone is interested in topic X. I have a slight interest in topic X, but I am pursuing other lines of inquiry. I am trying to dig out other government stuff. I would be very quick to say to that person, “What about this? Is there anything else you can do?”, or, “There is something there you could do”.

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon: I am quoting you here. Why, when you are asked about tabling Questions, did you say, “I mean, if I spoke on your behalf, I would have to declare an interest. You can do it. I have done it, but it would be easier to get a coterie of people who are supporters and make a point that I would ask them to do this issue, that issue or whatever”. You are suggesting that you would marshal this coterie of people because they would be the people who would have an interest in it. I have to say that that does not really come out of what you are saying. I know, for the record, that you are a past master in asking Questions yourself, but that is not a criticism.

Lord Laird: I have asked a few.

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon: I would be grateful for your view on this. In clearly stipulating to a third party, as it were, that it is very easy to get other people to put down Questions for whatever reason, you are bringing the Lords and Parliament in general into disrepute. It could be perceived as an underhand way of conducting business if one does not table one’s own Questions.

Lord Laird: Is that part of my appeal?

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon: Is it part of your appeal? Perhaps it is not part of your appeal. Forgive me, my Lords, but I thought that it was a relevant question.

Lord Laird: I know people who are interested in fracking, which I think is going to be one of the major topics that we are going to have to deal with. I take a wee bit of an interest in fracking but I have never really got down to taking my jacket off about it. If I had any information or thoughts about fracking, I would pass
them on to the person who would be interested in fracking. I do not think that that is anything other than that is what you would do in a workplace. Someone next door to you is interested in fracking or oil or energy, so you might say to them, “Have you looked at this way or thought of it from that way?” I would honestly think that was part of my job.

Q9. Lord Scott of Foscote: Lord Laird, the background to the occasion when all these characters presented themselves as the representatives of various commercial companies that came to see you was that they were holding out the possibility—fictitious as it turned out, but you would not have known that at the time—of you becoming a consultant to the companies they were representing. Is that a fair description of the background to what took place between you and these characters?

Lord Laird: They were holding out, in my opinion, the prospect that they would be seeking advice from me in some form.

Lord Scott of Foscote: Yes, but as I understand it, your role would be as a consultant. You would be employed as a consultant by the companies.

Lord Laird: That appeared at a certain stage. In both cases, but through the timescale I forgot about this, when I first got the stuff that turned out to be the Sunday Times—

Lord Scott of Foscote: I am rather more concerned about what happened at the time you were talking to these undercover journalists.

Lord Laird: It became clear when talking to them that because they were in the same trade as me, or the same trade as I had been in, they were talking about doing some stuff. As long as it did not affect this building and therefore did not affect the rules, that did not seem to me to be a particular problem.

Lord Scott of Foscote: I follow that, but they were suggesting that you would enter employment for their client or their company. Is that what they were putting to you?

Lord Laird: I think that that is what they were putting to me, but we never got far on in the discussions.

Lord Scott of Foscote: But that was the background to the information you were giving to them in the course of this interview about what a Peer could do.

Lord Laird: I was only giving a view of what a Peer can do. Do not forget that in both cases I talked heavily about two things. One was what can happen outside Parliament and the other was that I would not break the rules.

Lord Scott of Foscote: In telling them what a Peer could do, it might appear to someone who reads the transcript that you were, as it were, underlining the value that your services might have for them.

Lord Laird: In both cases, before you would enter into a final agreement, there would have to be a very detailed list. That is professionalism. You have to have a very detailed list of exactly what you are going to do, when you are going to do it and how you are going to do it, as well as how you are going to assess whether it has been successful or not, and who is going to look at and check the success with you. Sorry, I have lost the last part. Oh yes, the most important thing of all in a campaign like this is the command structure. None of that was ever brought into the conversation, let alone began to be developed. This was like a preliminary to the preliminary discussion.
Lord Scott of Foscote: How would you describe the purpose of your telling them all the things that a Peer could do? Why were you telling them that?

Lord Laird: Well, again, I wanted to make and I always tried to make—I am sorry, just give me a minute. I always wanted to try to make people relate to the House of Lords. I find that people, particularly possibly in Northern Ireland where I come from, hold the House of Lords in very high respect, and why should they not? But the point is that they would never think of coming along and talking to any of us or trying to make themselves understood. I always try to make things understood. I always do that. It is just a sort of answer to, “How do we do that?” I try to explain what is possible and what is not possible, what is there and what you do. I do not know if you have discovered this, but you get some very crazy ideas of what we actually do. I try to make it as understandable as possible and—this is an important point—if they have problems, and say to them, “Look, if there is ever anything I can do for you, would you let me know?”

Lord Scott of Foscote: Against the background of the possibility, which they thought there was, or maybe thought there was not but you may have thought there was, of you becoming a consultant to the company they purported to represent, one might naturally think that your details about what a Peer could do would be a means of enhancing your value to them if an agreement for you to become a consultant was ever reached.

Lord Laird: Well, that would not have occurred to me. I have lost quite a bit of cognitive ability. You will see that in the health reports. I have discovered that I miss a bit of the obvious. But the point is this: these were people whose job is to get out of bed in the morning, set up a scam system and try to bring somebody into it. Now, I am vulnerable.

Lord Scott of Foscote: I follow that. You were the victim, but—

Lord Laird: They were professionals trying to tie me in knots and I was vulnerable.

Lord Scott of Foscote: But what was your intention and what was your reason for explaining to them all the things that you as a Peer could do?

Lord Laird: I was trying to inform them. Particularly with the Sunday Times, the more I went on to go round that sort of area the more I began to sort of doubt their credibility. I mean, they claimed to know so little. But the trouble was that in the ambience of talking to people who you think are in the same trade and you are trying to explain how this fits into that and that fits into this, and, “Let us do it that way”, that was what I was trying to do. It never—

Lord Scott of Foscote: Did it not occur to you that you were sounding as though you were enhancing your value to them?

Lord Laird: No.

Q10. Baroness Scotland of Asthal: I wonder if I could ask a supplementary question. Would you turn, please, to pages 73 and 74? Page 73 of the transcript is the conversation you were having with the female reporter and male reporter; it is at the bottom, page 73.

Lord Laird: Page 73 and 74—yes.

Baroness Scotland of Asthal: If it helps you, if you have difficulty reading it, I will read it for you. The female reporter has been asking you about setting up a group—an all-party group—and she is suggesting to you, in the penultimate paragraph, that you perhaps should have more money for doing that. Do you see?
Lord Laird: Where is that?

Baroness Scotland of Asthal: On page 73 of the report from the Commissioner; it is the transcript.

Lord Laird: Oh yes, I see.

Baroness Scotland of Asthal: She suggests that you should get more money for setting up. Do you see? And you say, “Yeah, let me come back to you on that, as they say. If we get—You’ll understand it, because I mean we’re all very sort of crazy in our minds about the expenses scandal and all sorts of stuff. But if it gets anywhere near the red line, I’ll put a flag up. Do you know what I mean?” She says yes. And you say—and I want you to explain to us what you meant by it—”What we’re talking about here is not because—All you’re simply doing, really, is using the services of a public relations guy who happens to be in the Lords. It’s like going to a dentist who happens to be in the Lords.” What did you mean by that?

Lord Laird: You will note that in the case of their introductory discussions they said that they were looking for a consultant. They did not say that the consultant had to be a Member of Parliament, in either place. They said they were looking for a consultant. I think you will find that they implied it would be handy, or something like that, if I was, if the person employed, was in the Lords. What I am saying here is that if I was their public relations person—if I was doing public relations for them—that would just be me helping them doing stuff outside or whatever it happens to be along the lines they discussed.

Baroness Scotland of Asthal: Not because you happen to be a Member of our House.

Lord Laird: No, no. Excuse me, It is a bit like the dentist, you know. The fact that he is a dentist is unimportant. The fact that he comes here in the afternoon and is a dentist is not important; in the morning he fills teeth.

Baroness Scotland of Asthal: So that is your explanation for the answers you were giving to Lord Scott. You were not suggesting that you were doing this as a Member of the House of Lords. You were doing it as a consultant.

Lord Laird: Oh yes. I have 14 and a half years here. I come over every week from Northern Ireland. It can be a wee bit of a lonely experience. It can be a wee bit discommoding from your life, and all your family and commitments. To be able to keep your hand in at something you thought you were good at and used to lecture in university about, does not seem to me to be something that I should not do. When I was appointed here, one of the things that I felt I could try and bring was any communications skills that I may have. Now I may be wrong on that, but that was what I thought. You may note, from other parts of the presentation, other ideas that I have had, other things that I have done, in running functions where we debate and discuss all sorts of things, even running a thing called—I do not know if you read the Food for Thought-type launch—

Q11. The Chairman: Can I ask you one question? In your discussions with the reporters, there are discussions about what you may do, what you can do, what you are prepared to do. You refer to the fact that you do not want to break the rules; that you would not break the rules. You said today that you do not have a detailed knowledge of those rules. Can you direct us to anywhere in your conversations with the reporters where you say anything to the effect of, “Before reaching a decision, I would wish to take advice on what the rules are”? I do not mean those precise words, but that general tenor.
**Lord Laird:** There is, for example, the one that Lady Scotland was referring to. There is more, actually. “But if it gets anywhere near the red line, I’ll put up a flag up”, which means that I have got to find out.

**The Chairman:** No, that is not saying that you would take advice.

**Lord Laird:** Well, there is another; there is at least one other case. Well, it is what I would normally do; it is what I would do. I know this is a large organisation—the House of Lords and its employees. I do not know of any facilities specially to help people who are dyslexic to understand things—there could very well be, which may be my fault.

**The Chairman:** Sorry, that is not the point I want to make. It is possible that people who are not dyslexic would not know in detail what the rules are.

**Lord Laird:** Yes, I agree with you.

**The Chairman:** They would say, “I have a general idea what the rules are but I am not sure. Before I can say anything to you about what I would do, I would want to check that I would be acting within the rules”. I am just looking for some sort of statement anywhere in the dialogue that you come near to saying anything like that.

**Lord Laird:** I keep on saying that I will not break the rules.

**The Chairman:** Yes, but you say that you do not know what the rules are.

**Lord Laird:** Well that implies that I am going to go and find out.

**The Chairman:** Oh, I see.

**Lord Laird:** Sorry?

**Q12. Lord Mackay of Clashfern:** Would you look at page 139 with the “Panorama” people, at the top of the page. You say, “Look, I’m not ... there are rules, and you cannot break the rules.” The response is, “Sure”. “If you want to break the rules, I would be acting, let’s say, like a consultant who just happens to be in Parliament but not using my position in Parliament because that I think is not, that’s not correct, if you follow my point”. Were you not there at least trying to make the distinction between doing something outside Parliament because you could not do it inside Parliament?

**Lord Laird:** Yes.

**Q13. Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** I would like to clarify something on page 73 again. This is where we have had a couple of questions. The last one was from Lady Scotland and she was looking at the bottom of the page. Earlier on, we were looking further up the page where you say, “I’m the chairman of the Earth Foundation. I’m chairman of that adviser board. I mean, that’s a sort of—I’m a retired PR guy, but I like the sort of challenge you talk about and I’d like to be able to help you guys, for a minor consideration, of course.” And just before we leave this part, at that stage the point was made that you were asking for money, in effect, by saying “for a minor consideration”. Your response was along the lines of saying, “Yes, but they”—the people who were talking to you—“had been going on about money beforehand”. So you were actually responding to that. I wonder if you would help me find where they had been going on about money. In the time since Lady Scotland asked the question, I have been looking back through the papers to help my recollection and I cannot actually see where the people interviewing you have been going on about money and what they might pay you before. It appears to the person reading it, from page 73, as though you raise the
issue of payment there for the first time, because they then say, “Absolutely. Now
how does that work? Do you have a fixed fee or do you—?” So to the reader, it
looks as though that is the first occasion on which payment is being raised, and it is
by you.

**Lord Scott of Foscote:** On page 78?

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** No, page 73. The question was on page 73 which
is the first time that Lord Laird says, “I’d like to help you guys, for a minor
consideration, of course”. And in response to a question on that, he said that the
reason he raised it was because he had been under pressure; that they had been
going on about money. So of course what is relevant is only what the people
interviewing Lord Laird say before that point. I am struggling to find anything
before that point where they have been going on about money and that they might
pay him at all.

**Lord Scott of Foscote:** On page 65 there is a reference.

**Lord Laird:** “We’d have to pay for them.”

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** Again, what I am looking for is pressure on you by
the people interviewing you. I can understand that you naturally raised the issue of
costs, but I understood you to say in answer to a previous question that the reason
you had referred to the minor consideration was because “they” had been going on
about money being paid to you.

**The Chairman:** I think there is something on the bottom of page 65.

**Lord Laird:** To be honest with you—oh yes, did you see that?

**Q14. Baroness Scotland of Asthal:** Just for completeness, it might be useful to
look at what you say on page 139. It is the same page that you were asked about a
moment ago by Lord Mackay of Clashfern. It is the third from the bottom, where
you say: “What the work is. But … I mean I do not … just let me underline this
point again. I will not be … and you wouldn’t expect, you’re not asking … just so
there’s no misunderstanding I wouldn’t be involved in anything other than good
and proper … orchestrated, organised lobbying. And putting up a case. And I
don’t want … I will not be misusing my position as … I’m just using the expertise
gained, if you like, and the knowledge gained.” That is just to help the Lord
Chairman.

**The Chairman:** In what context would you be involved in lobbying?

**Lord Laird:** I go back to my original concept of what the whole area of public
relations is, by creating a climate of opinion. Lord Chairman, if you were being
met by people in the street et cetera who raised issues with you as a result of
activities that had happened around a PR campaign, that might give you an idea to
support something in here— not necessarily that anything has been said in here,
but it is the creation of a climate of opinion. A good example is that at some stage
someone is going to have to fight a battle on fracking. Just as a matter of interest I
am for fracking, but the anti-frackers are running away with it. If we are going to
succeed as a country, we are going to have to win that.

**The Chairman:** I am trying to get a handle on the precise type of activities you
would include under “orchestrated, organised lobbying”. What actual activities
would you engage in?

**Lord Laird:** What you would do is make it simple for people. If it was fracking,
for example, if you were for fracking, you would mobilise the people who are
interested in fracking and spread information about fracking. You would look to
get really involved in fracking. You would signal to the people in a particular area
at some stage that you want to make your opinions known to the key decision-
makers in that area. It may be the local councillors or it may be the MP, or maybe
Members of our House. You want to make your opinions known to them, you
being Mr Voter or Mr Ordinary Guy, for want of a better word. That is the
concept of creating a climate of opinion. It is not me, it is not a PR guy; it is the
girl next door talking to the local Member of Parliament saying, “We can’t miss
this opportunity for fracking in Northern Ireland. Look at the type of money we
are going to make.” You have created a climate of opinion in which the MP
believes, rightly—this is totally acceptable in my opinion and what democracy is all
about—that there is backing in his constituency or his area for fracking. It means
that he can possibly take a different view or do other activities in the Commons,
up here or wherever about fracking when it comes up.

The Chairman: So if you were taking part in this organised and orchestrated
lobbying, you would see talking to an MP about the benefits of fracking as part of
that.

Lord Laird: Oh no. Not me. The big issue is not me. I am sorry and I beg your
pardon.

The Chairman: I really want to know about the phrase, “I wouldn’t want to be
involved in anything other than good and proper … orchestrated, organised
lobbying.” I would like to know what activities you would take part in as part of
organised, orchestrated lobbying, which is what you say you would do.

Lord Laird: Yes. Let us take fracking. For the sake of argument let us look at
Somerset. I would be trying to find out, as a PR guy, what is the decision-making
process and who are the people. What is the thing in Somerset? Who are the
people who count? Who are the people who make the decisions? What is the
complexion of the seats? You would target those areas with information about
fracking. The best kind of communication is when you, let us say, get farmer to
talk to farmer. What you look for in Somerset is to get farmers who are in support
of fracking to talk to other farmers. By continuing that process you are developing
a climate of opinion. The other thing is to get shopkeepers in one village to talk to
shopkeepers in another village saying, “This is going to be really good for the
economy around here”. All that creates a climate of opinion which will hit the
newspapers and—this is interesting—will affect the local Member or Members of
Parliament. What I am doing in my job as a PR guy, whether I am in this House or
not, is totally irrelevant. You would be orchestrating that, or least I probably
would not be doing the street work. I do not have the health and ability to do the
street work. But I would like to put together a campaign like that and I feel
strongly about fracking.

Q15. Lord Wallace of Tankerness: Lord Laird, can I ask you to look at page
137 of the transcript where you are discussing with the “Panorama” people not
fracking but how to rehabilitate Fiji so that it might be readmitted to the
Commonwealth. Just about halfway down the reporter says, “I’ve made a list of
some of the … the … some of the more out of the box suggestions you have made.
But can we also call upon you to do some of the bog standards that will just please
our client a la raising things in the House? Is that also …?” You reply, “Yeah …
I’ll not things myself but we’ll get other people if you like that’s the point.”
Further down in the third paragraph from the bottom of the page you say, “Well
you see the point is, if I take this on, obviously there is, I would be doing it for
monetary reward, and I don’t want … I don’t want to be having to unveil that
because it weakens the position”. “Right.” “Plus the fact that it’s much better …
I’d have to list my interests … who I worked for whatever … the organisation is, that’s not a big issue, but if I asked a question I have to declare an interest. Now that doesn’t stop me, we can still do that. That’s fine. But you want more than me. You don’t … you don’t want it sounding as if the only bloody person in Parliament who raises any bloody thing about Fiji is the guy they pay.” Picking up on your previous answer when you said that you wanted farmer to farmer to be talking about fracking, would not the implication from what you have said there be that you want various Peers to be raising issues about Fiji?

**Lord Laird:** Yes.

**Lord Wallace of Tankerness:** And do you think that is consistent with you being a consultant and a Member of the House of Lords—of using your position as a Member of the House of Lords with contact with Peers to be getting them to raise issues for Fiji? To use your own words—

**Lord Laird:** I would not be contacting Peers.

**Lord Wallace of Tankerness:** You would be remunerated.

**Lord Laird:** Let us take the Fiji case. We talked about the use of the rugby team at the meeting. It was a much better idea than I thought it was, to be honest with you. Off the top of my head when talking to these guys, I thought that the team could twin with the Ulster rugby team. They would therefore have plenty of opportunity when in Ulster to talk to the key decision-makers—MPs et cetera. That is when the issue is put to Members in this building, not by me.

**Lord Wallace of Tankerness:** That may be one of the “out of the box” suggestions, to use the reporter’s words. But he then asked about raising things in the House, and you say that you will get other people to do it. What I want to understand from you is whether you think that it is acceptable and consistent with the rules to get other Peers to raise issues on an issue for which you also have monetary reward.

**Lord Laird:** Okay. In that case it would not be acceptable, but I am not saying I would do that. What I am saying is that if you ran a big reception in Belfast City Hall for the Fiji team and all sorts of stuff, you are going to be inviting all the key decision-makers. It is just an example. Fiji, to a lot of people, is very far away and sort of romantic-type stuff. They do not understand, perhaps, about the poverty and a lot to do with the Commonwealth. How do we spread that message? The best form of spreading a message like that is subliminally. What you do not want to do is to go along blasting it in front of people’s faces. You have a very good rugby team, to take an example, which can beat any team in the world, so that is going to focus the local media on Fiji and bring a lot of interest. The subtlety there is to slip in the fact—which, for instance, I did not know until talking to these guys—that Fiji was out of the Commonwealth and wants back in; I do not know what is true or not now, it is all up in the air. That is the sort of thing you would be doing, to create a climate of opinion whereby people would say, “Oh, Fiji! Wouldn’t that be a nice place to go to for the summer?” It wants back into the Commonwealth. Who is going raise that with a local MP, or write a wee note to him? It is going to be me. That is why we all get in the post every day a lot of letters about a lot of issues. Somebody has been out stirring the pot and creating a climate of opinion. That is the big secret, in my opinion, in public relations: the climate of opinion. Lobbying is a different exercise. As I said to you earlier, I do not agree with it. I do not think that it is good. That is what I call old-school-tie activity. It is actually not viable and is a waste of money; there is nothing I can say for it.
Q16. Lord Newby: I am sorry if I am labouring the point, but we talked earlier about Fiji and you said that you might have given advice to the Fijians almost out of intellectual curiosity; you were interested in them. But you were not interested in being paid for doing that. That is what you said in answer to an earlier question, am I right?

Lord Laird: Let me put it this way. I would have done it for nothing, but they kept talking about money. It was quite clear that the money was something that they were on. Perhaps I fell into a trap—£2,000 for a number of ideas is actually quite small in our business. It is more or less a normal type of thing. I could have thought that if there was going to be money flying about, as long it does not affect the rules here and is not in this building, then why not?

Lord Newby: So that is why you said, “I will be suggesting a retainer. Well, you’re probably talking about starting at £2,000 a month”.

Lord Laird: Yes. But that is not for stuff in this building.

Q17. Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville: I am trying to get a better fix on the nature of your relationships with the people with whom you worked. I am profoundly impressed that you have tabled 12,000 Questions. I am conscious that at some stage during that period, the rule was introduced that if you had an interest, you needed to put a capital letter “I” by the Question. I do not know exactly when that occurred, but it did, and it obviously occurred because there was a concern about it. Clearly the 12,000 Questions were not passed on to anyone else to ask. As a matter of curiosity, roughly how many of those 12,000 Questions which you asked before the letter “I” was introduced would in fact have been that sort of Question?

Lord Laird: None.

Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville: Could you say a word or two on what they were about?

Lord Laird: I would take a few topics; that was not particularly lucid, which proves it was very hard. The particularly busy time I had, when I really felt that there was a lot of work to be done, was during the time before devolution. I was getting stuff on a daily basis. One of the issues that I took up was that of deaf people in Northern Ireland. I was approached by my solicitor, who is a trustee of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf. Something in Northern Ireland was just not working as it should do for the deaf; the provision of some equipment. I put down a Question and I got a successful Answer. From then on, it has worked like a dream. I take endless pride in that. I think it is what I am here for. It makes my day really worth while. That was my good friend on my right, my solicitor. I was pleased, absolutely delighted, to help him. He puts a lot of hard work into charities.

Q18. The Chairman: Lord Laird, I think we have come to the end of the question-and-answer session on the substance of the Commissioner’s findings. On the substance, do you have anything you want to say that you think that you have not had the opportunity to say so far, or that you wish the Committee to hear?

Lord Laird: Are the questions here today just on the charges I am facing, as opposed also to other stuff? That is the issue.

The Chairman: The Commissioner’s findings?

Lord Laird: Yes. I am happy. Thank you very much. Thanks for the opportunity, my Lord Chairman.
The Chairman: The next thing is that you are also appealing against the sanction that the Sub-Committee has recommended. We obviously have your written appeal and we also have the medical reports which you drew to our attention at the very beginning of the meeting. Are there additional things that you wish to bring to our attention?

Lord Laird: I remind the Committee that I have co-operated with the Commissioner at every stage and turn without any problem. But I self-referred this issue. Nobody else did it. I am very happy and I stand by the written documentation on my health and by what I believe I have done. I believe that I have successfully helped to promote understanding of the House of Lords, particularly in Northern Ireland but also elsewhere. I think that that sort of thing, which I outline, should be taken into account.

The Chairman: Thank you for your attendance and your help, and I ask you now to retire.

Lord Laird: I thank the Committee. It has been awkward, I know, and I am sorry about this. It is pleasant and unpleasant, if you know what I mean, to do this. I appreciate the tolerance, sympathy and understanding that I have received here. Thank you.