



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Social Development

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into allegations arising from a BBC NI  
'Spotlight' programme aired on 3 July 2013 of  
impropriety or irregularity relating to NIHE-managed  
contracts and consideration of any resulting actions:  
Glass and Glazing Federation Briefing

21 November 2013

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson)

Mr Mickey Brady (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Jim Allister

Ms Paula Bradley

Mr Trevor Clarke

Mr Stewart Dickson

Mrs Dolores Kelly

Mr Fra McCann

Mr Sammy Wilson

**Witnesses:**

Mr Giles Willson

Glass and Glazing Federation

**The Chairperson:** I welcome Giles Wilson, who is deputy chief executive of the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF). I remind members of the rule on procedural fairness. You have that as part of your documentation on the inquiry. Giles, you will be aware that there has been an issue about the role or non-role of the Glass and Glazing Federation. You kindly agreed to come to address that matter today. So, I think that you know what we are asking you to respond to. We have a rule on operational and procedural fairness, so we will give you an opportunity to present your case, and then members will ask questions if they need to.

**Mr Giles Willson (Glass and Glazing Federation):** Thank you, Chairman and Committee, for giving me the opportunity to represent the Glass and Glazing Federation. We had picked up from our researches that GGF had been cited quite a few times in discussions, so we are pleased that we can come to answer any questions and explain exactly what the Glass and Glazing Federation is. Given some of the questions that have been asked and what has appeared, this is where some of the confusion has arisen.

The Glass and Glazing Federation is a trade association. We have members who pay to be a member of the GGF, but, before they can come into membership, they have to meet certain criteria. They have to have three years' trading accounts, we have to have references and we inspect the company to make sure that it meets a certain standard. Once someone is in membership, they can use our logo and explain that they are a member of the Glass and Glazing Federation. Logos are often used on vehicles because of the type of work that those people do, which is replacing windows. I should explain that we cover the whole spectrum of the window industry, including glass manufacture, glass processing, window fabrication and installation. We cover the whole spectrum,

and the supply chain can be quite complicated, as you are probably all aware. Members will use our logos, and it is a way for them to differentiate themselves from their competitors to show that they are an established organisation and that they comply with the federation's rules and regulations.

One of the key points about the GGF is that members are individual companies and work in their own right. When someone is talking to the Glass and Glazing Federation or somebody representing the GGF, there would normally be somebody such as myself who is an officer of the federation or, at times, we will brief a member to represent us when it is felt prudent. They will have first been briefed by the committee. Under the governance and structure of the federation, we have a board, executives, specialist groups and regional groups. In Northern Ireland, we have a regional group, so anyone who trades in Northern Ireland can go to that group meeting. They each have a chairman of their own, they will be briefed and each group will have an officer who is the secretary for that group. However, to have a representative of the GGF for the view of the GGF, it will normally be an officer. It is fairly clear when a member is representing the Glass and Glazing Federation, because, apart from having a brief, there is the subtle difference that we pay their expenses to attend and represent the federation — they may incur travel costs — and it shows that they are representing not only their own personal business but the whole organisation. That is an overview of how the Glass and Glazing Federation operates and what our principles are.

We are here to develop standards for the industry, and those industry standards often become British and international standards. The chief executive of the GGF, Nigel Rees, sends his apologies. He would have been here, but he is leading the UK delegation to China for an international standards committee meeting. That is the sort of work that we do in looking to expand standards and to raise the quality of our industry sector.

So, that is an overview of how we operate and what we do. I welcome any questions so that I can give you clarification about how I can help with the inquiry.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, again, Giles, for taking the time to come over here. I know that you are based in London, so thank you for the travel time and so on.

The people who were here last week from Turkington Holdings Ltd made it very clear that they were representing Turkington's. As you know from our correspondence with you, the issue has been raised by the Minister and there has been repeated reference to the fact that the meeting on 16 April was with representatives of your federation. Part of our terms of reference in our inquiry is to establish the accuracy of that, and that is specifically why we addressed you and invited you here.

**Mr G Willson:** The BBC researcher asked us whether the meeting with the Minister was with GGF representatives. We keep records of our meetings and briefs, and we checked them. We did not have a representation. It was not a GGF meeting. It was not organised by us at all. None of the officers was aware of that meeting taking place and we would not be, if it was not a GGF meeting.

**Mr S Wilson:** Who are your representatives in Northern Ireland?

**Mr G Willson:** I can provide a list of all the members.

**Mr S Wilson:** You said that you have regional groups and that there is an officer from that group who is regarded as your representative. Who is that in Northern Ireland?

**Mr G Willson:** We have a regional secretary for Northern Ireland. The gentleman who has been looking after that is Mr Declan Moore. He has just resigned from the GGF, but that is not related to this incident at all. So, there is currently a vacancy, which we will cover by our internal staff. An officer will come over for anything with the members who are based here.

**Mr Allister:** I have a couple of things. You are a trade association. Are you the sole trade association for the industry, or are there alternatives?

**Mr G Willson:** There are alternative trade associations. The Glass and Glazing Federation represents all framing materials, but you tend to get other trade associations with specialisms, such as the British Woodworking Federation, which deals only with timber windows and timber products. There is also the Council for Aluminium in Building, which, as the name dictates, is for anything to do with

aluminium but includes windows and curtain walling. There is also the Steel Window Association and the British Plastics Federation; they also deal with windows.

**Mr Allister:** Can a company belong to multiple trade groups?

**Mr G Willson:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** You said that, as a consequence of paying your fees and belonging to the federation, people can use the logo on vans etc. Can you use it on notepaper?

**Mr G Willson:** Yes, you can use it on letterheads and business cards.

**Mr Allister:** You have standards. What is the status of those standards?

**Mr G Willson:** The standards that we produce cover a variety of issues including health and safety, the installation of windows —

**Mr Allister:** Let us take the installation of windows.

**Mr G Willson:** The standards are written by committee, which is our members. They are reviewed by a standards committee. We have a working group and a standards committee, but the standards are written by members for members. That is the GGF document that will be published.

**Mr Allister:** Does that state how your members must install windows, or is it guidance? What is the status of it?

**Mr G Willson:** It is guidance. There are certain things that they must do, such as comply with the code of conduct, but it depends on the name of the document. It is quite hard because there is a British standard called a code of practice, which means that, if you are installing a window or door, you must follow good practice. However, for every window or building, there will be a variety of scenarios, so you cannot specify a fixed method of installation. If you are making a new product on a production line, such as an insulated glass unit, it is easier to manufacture it in a consistent manner.

**Mr Allister:** And you must manufacture it to a British standard.

**Mr G Willson:** It could be a British or European standard.

**Mr Allister:** Whereas your standard is a free-standing matter; it does not have the status of a British standard.

**Mr G Willson:** It does not have the status of a British standard. The difference between a British standard and a GGF standard is that a British standard goes out to public inquiry for comment. I chair the British Standards Institution (BSI) committee for windows and doors. That is one of my roles. All the other trade associations and other representatives are on that group. It is a bigger group, and it goes out to public inquiry, so anybody can make a comment on the standards. In reality — many people around the table will appreciate this — a standard on the installation of windows and doors would normally get comments only from building control inspectors and representatives of manufacturers and trade associations. I have never seen a comment from a member of the general public, because it is very technical and specific document. It goes out for public comment, but it is a specialism.

**Mr Allister:** Let us revert to the meeting of 16 April. You are quite clear that you knew nothing about it before it took place.

**Mr G Willson:** Correct.

**Mr Allister:** You were not represented at it.

**Mr G Willson:** Correct.

**Mr Allister:** Turkington's was not representing you.

**Mr G Willson:** No.

**Mr Allister:** If they had wanted to represent you, they would have required your authority.

**Mr G Willson:** Correct.

**Mr Allister:** And they did not seek that.

**Mr G Willson:** Correct.

**Mr Allister:** Have you any reason to think that they claimed to represent you?

**Mr G Willson:** I would not have thought so. The company is a GGF member and has been with the GGF for a considerable time. It is aware of the rules, and it has even chaired the Northern Ireland region. They are familiar with the rules. If they had wanted to represent us, the procedure is not hard. They would have said, "We want to visit the Minister and have a meeting". We would have either briefed them or said, as we have done before, "We need to have a regional meeting because, if it is a regional issue or is about a particular standard, it will go to the relevant committee to ensure that there is a correct briefing for them to represent us".

**Mr Allister:** You have a procedure. If the procedure is breached, would there be consequences for the member company?

**Mr G Willson:** Yes. If a member does not follow procedure, no matter what the procedure is, it will be referred to our finance and membership committee. We refer everyone to committees. I would give a report on what had happened, and the committee would review it and decide on the most appropriate action.

**Mr Allister:** Has there been any reference of Turkington's over the meeting of 16 April 2012?

**Mr G Willson:** I am sorry?

**Mr Allister:** Has there been any reference or complaint in respect of Turkington's claiming to represent the Glass and Glazing Federation at that meeting?

**Mr G Willson:** No. It has been brought to the attention of the finance and membership committee because we are being asked about it as a result of this inquiry. That committee is aware that questions are being asked. The GGF has not received an official complaint from anybody to say that somebody was misrepresenting the GGF at that meeting.

**Mr Allister:** You have no reason to think that Turkington's claimed to be representing the Glass and Glazing Federation.

**Mr G Willson:** Obviously, I was not at the meeting, so I could not say that definitely. So far, however, nobody has brought it up.

**Mr Allister:** They have told us that they did not.

**Mr G Willson:** I am aware of that. I have been given the transcripts. They said that they were not representing the GGF. To date, we have not heard anybody say that, apart from what the Minister has stated. We have not had a formal complaint that we were being misrepresented. That is what the complaint would be — that somebody was misrepresenting us.

**Mr Allister:** The Minister has said several times that the meeting on that date was with the federation.

**Mr G Willson:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** Have you any explanation for that?

**Mr G Willson:** I could not answer why the Minister would say that. This is speculation, but I have not seen a Turkington letterhead so I do not know whether it uses the GGF logo.

**Mr Allister:** May I show you the letter asking for the meeting?

**The Chairperson:** I am sorry; in the interest of procedural fairness we cannot present witnesses with —

**Mr Allister:** It is from our papers. It is one of the exhibits. It is the letter —

**The Chairperson:** I am sorry, Jim. Remind us what page that is on.

**Mr Clarke:** Number 10.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you. I am sorry, Jim.

**Mr G Willson:** The point that I was going to make is that members are allowed to use the GGF logo on their letterhead. I do not have a copy of the current Turkington letterhead or their correspondence, so I do not know whether they use it. We have members who use the logo and some who do not use it at all.

**Mr Allister:** Chairman, I was going to ask Mr Willson to look at a copy of the letter from Turkington Holdings Ltd asking for the meeting with the Minister, which is the very meeting in question. It is the letter of 2 February. Can I do that?

**The Chairperson:** OK. Yes.

**Mr Allister:** That is a copy; it is not the original. Do you see any logo of the Glass and Glazing Federation on that?

**Mr G Willson:** No.

**Mr Allister:** Thank you.

At one stage, there was an assertion that Fusion21 was at that meeting. Who are Fusion21 in glass and glazing industry terms?

**Mr G Willson:** Fusion21, I believe, is not a GGF member. It is, I believe, a systems house that serves the supply chain. It is a trade name for a profile system.

**Mr Allister:** A profile system. Is it not a social economy organisation?

**Mr G Willson:** I do not know a great deal about it. I have not researched Fusion21, so I cannot comment properly on it.

**Mr Allister:** OK. Thank you very much.

**Mr Dickson:** My question has been answered. It was about the logo on the paper.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Thank you, Mr Willson. Just to reiterate: the associate members and members of your organisation are very clear about the rules and about how and when people can claim to represent your federation, so there could be no possible confusion.

**Mr G Willson:** It should be clear, but it depends. Members will often give their name and say that they are from company x and are a member of the GGF. The person who receives that message understands that the person belongs to a membership organisation, but we are all members of all sorts of groups and associations that we do not represent.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Many of my questions have been asked, but I want to be assured on one point. You said that there have been no complaints. Has Minister Nelson McCausland made a formal complaint

to the federation to say that an organisation such as Turkington's or someone else has claimed to represent your federation when they obviously did not?

**Mr G Willson:** We have not received a complaint such as that.

**Mrs D Kelly:** OK. Thank you.

**Mr Clarke:** I apologise for missing your opening remarks. How do you become a member of the GGF?

**Mr G Willson:** We have an application form and process, and you have to fulfil certain criteria, one of which is that you need to provide three years of audited accounts, which is to show that you are an established business and that you have not phoenixed. You also have to provide trade references that we will check out to see your organisation's reputation. The GGF will also organise a visit to the company. We inspect how the organisation manufactures or installs its product and how it manages its business. We also check health and safety records to make sure that there is a health and safety policy in place and generally ensure that the organisation meets all the requirements of legislation, including European directives or anything applicable to the industry.

**Mr Clarke:** Would it be safe to say that the majority of your members have a fairly large employee base?

**Mr G Willson:** That is not always the case. We have larger companies; we have nationals. However, we also have some small companies that employ one or two people, but they tend to be very specialised organisations.

**Mr Clarke:** I am basically trying to establish that no individual could apply to become a member of GGF just because they fit windows.

**Mr G Willson:** No. You have to meet our criteria, and you would —

**Mr Clarke:** So the process is fairly robust.

**Mr G Willson:** Yes. You would also have to agree to follow our guidance and code, and we check that out.

**Mr Clarke:** I was interested in your response to Jim — it may have been another member — when you said that it was appropriate for a member of your organisation to use your logo on their letterhead or business card. Do you accept that that could sometimes be misconstrued, in terms of the representation of that individual, if they forward that card to someone?

**Mr G Willson:** No. We —

**Mr Clarke:** Would you see it as the endorsement of the GGF in terms of their representation?

**Mr G Willson:** No. It is like a lot of logos and letterheads that we all use. For example, the GGF has ISO 9000 registration through the BSI, and we use that on our letterheads. That does not mean that I represent the BSI; it shows that I meet the criteria and we have ISO 9000 registration through BSI. Likewise, many other organisations and professionals can be and are members of professional bodies whose logo they may use on their business cards. That does not mean that they represent that organisation. It is an endorsement, because a business card or letterhead will have the company name.

**Mr Clarke:** May I hand you a copy of the letter that Jim handed you? The member asked you to look for a logo on it, but would you read the content of the letter? Do you accept that the letter makes it clear that Turkington's indicated its membership of the Glass and Glazing Federation, despite the letter not having the logo on it?

**Mr G Willson:** Yes. The letter is quite clear. It says:

*"We are also active members of the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF)."*

**Mr Clarke:** If you received that letter, could you accept that they were coming with that organisation's representative view, given that they purport to bring forward their guidelines? Do you accept that there could be confusion caused by the admission of that in the letter?

**Mr G Willson:** I am reading the letter, but it does not say that. With my knowledge of trade associations and membership, I would not have taken that on board. I cannot judge whether the person who received the letter thought that it was representing the GGF.

**Mr Clarke:** Let us say that the person who received that letter has no background in the building trade or trade organisations. It is difficult to ask you this, given that you come from such a knowledgeable background, but, if you read that as a person with no knowledge of the industry or of trade organisations, could you see why an individual could come to the conclusion that those individuals represented the view of an organisation of which they were members?

**Mr G Willson:** I really would find that quite hard. A meeting would have been arranged using the GGF letterhead, and we would have organised —

**Mr Clarke:** That is you bringing your knowledge to bear. I am asking you to step outside your knowledge of your own organisation and look at it as someone who has no knowledge of the building industry or trade organisations whatsoever, in any shape or manner. Just look at how the letter is worded and the reference to the Glass and Glazing Federation.

**The Chairperson:** The question has been answered twice.

**Mr G Willson:** I am happy to answer the question. You can analyse a sentence and the wording of a letter. There is a sentence that reads:

*"We are also active members of the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF)."*

That is one statement. The next sentence begins "With our experience". From that, I would have inferred that "our experience" is the experience of Turkington Holdings Ltd, but what you are asking is whether the phrase relates to the previous sentence. To what does "our" refer? Had it stated, "with GGF experience", it would have been clear that they represented the GGF. From reading the letter, I would say that "with our experience" relates to the experience of the person sending the letter. As you look at it, that would mean the general manager of Turkington Holdings Ltd, not the Glass and Glazing Federation.

It gets complicated. It goes on to mention:

*"an active role within the National Standards Body (GGF)"*

That is not technically correct because we are not the national standards body, although that is neither here nor there. It then states:

*"we feel that we have a lot to offer the Department and to the Housing Executive".*

I would expect that, when anyone has a meeting, regardless of the letter, if you are not clear about who is representing whom, that would be clarified in the opening remarks of a meeting when you are giving business cards and explaining whom you represent. A meeting may have been arranged, and it would have been then that that would have been clarified. In the numerous meetings that I attend to represent the GGF, either with a member or by myself, I explain who I am and whom I represent.

**Mr Clarke:** You will accept the difficulty that we have in that there are no minutes of the meeting, so we do not know who they claimed to represent or whether there were further references to the Glass and Glazing Federation.

**Mr Allister:** With respect, there is a minute.

**Mr Clarke:** No, there is not. There is an aide-memoire.

**Mr Allister:** The Minister calls it a minute.



**Mr Clarke:** A minute was not circulated.

**The Chairperson:** All right, folks.

**Mr G Willson:** That, again, is a difficulty because our members could arrange meetings with other members or a Minister. It is up to them how they arrange them. I have had meetings with the Housing Executive to talk about issues, but I will always make my own notes. I will make my own notes of today's meeting, because I have to write a report that will go to my board to say that I have come here to answer questions. That is why we always encourage our members to stress that it is a GGF meeting; that is of far more power. People appreciate that, in meeting the GGF, it is not an individual company's point of view. I cannot answer for individual members, but they appreciate that, even in the minutes of one of the meetings for the Northern Ireland region, with the GGF working together they have a far more powerful voice than as an individual company. An individual company could go to see a Minister, but, if they want to speak from the point of view of the GGF, they understand that that is a totally different issue.

**The Chairperson:** In fairness, you are not in the mind of anyone who requested or attended a meeting.

**Mr Brady:** Thank you very much for your presentation. Just to clarify the status of the minute, last week Mr Sands described it as an "aide-memoire", so, obviously, some sort of record was kept of that meeting.

I will not labour the point, but you made it very clear that, if people were to represent the GGF at a meeting, particularly with a Minister, they would have to have your imprimatur. In other words, they would have to go through the procedures, which, you have said, are strict, including a briefing etc.

**Mr G Willson:** Yes.

**Mr Brady:** As a federation, do you have an accreditation system? You mentioned three years' audited accounts and so on, and I presume that there are high standards. Do you have an accreditation process that members adhere to or have to go through to be able to use the logo and say that they are members of the federation?

**Mr G Willson:** There is a membership application process to be followed, and there are different stages to be gone through. People can be on hold until they meet the criteria. If a company does not meet the criteria for membership, we have a promotional programme, which means that it can have some of the benefits of membership but cannot claim to be a member until its staff are trained and educated to come up to our standard. That is often because they do not have sufficient trading accounts or are unable to demonstrate sufficient quality to meet our standards. We have a programme that they would go on.

**Mr Brady:** So it is a form of accreditation through which, finally, they will be accepted into the federation.

**Mr G Willson:** Yes. As I mentioned, the Glass and Glazing Federation has ISO 9000 registration, which includes the membership process. We get independently audited to ensure that, as an application is processed, we meet all those stages.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you. No other members have indicated that they want to ask a question. Thank you, Mr Willson, for travelling here today and presenting your evidence. You have been very helpful. We wish you a safe journey home.