



House of Commons
Committee on Standards

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

Sixth Report of Session 2013–14

Volume II

Additional written evidence

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The Committee on Standards

The Committee on Standards is appointed by the House of Commons to oversee the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; to examine the arrangements proposed by the Commissioner for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Interests and any other registers of interest established by the House; to review from time to time the form and content of those registers; to consider any specific complaints made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests referred to it by the Commissioner; to consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches in the Code of Conduct which have been drawn to the Committee's attention by the Commissioner; and to recommend any modifications to the Code of Conduct as may from time to time appear to be necessary.

Current membership

Rt hon Kevin Barron MP (*Labour, Rother Valley*) (Chair)
Sir Paul Beresford MP (*Conservative, Mole Valley*)
Mr Robert Buckland MP (*Conservative, South Swindon*)
Rt hon Tom Clarke MP (*Labour, Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill*)
Mr Christopher Chope MP (*Conservative, Christchurch*)
Mr Geoffrey Cox MP (*Conservative, Torridge and West Devon*)
Sharon Darcy (*Lay Member*)
Rt Hon Sir Nick Harvey MP (*Liberal Democrat, North Devon*)
Mr Peter Jinman (*Lay Member*)
Fiona O'Donnell MP (*Labour, East Lothian*)
Mr Walter Rader (*Lay Member*)
Heather Wheeler MP (*Conservative, South Derbyshire*)
Dr Alan Whitehead MP (*Labour, Southampton Test*)

The following were also Members of the Committee during the Parliament:
Annette Brooke MP (*Liberal Democrat, Mid Dorset and North Poole*)

Powers

The constitution and powers of the Committee are set out in Standing Order No. 149. In particular, the Committee has power to order the attendance of any Member of Parliament before the committee and to require that specific documents or records in the possession of a Member relating to its inquiries, or to the inquiries of the Commissioner, be laid before the Committee. The Committee has power to refuse to allow its public proceedings to be broadcast. The Law Officers, if they are Members of Parliament, may attend and take part in the Committee's proceedings, but may not vote.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at: www.parliament.uk/standards.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Eve Samson (Clerk), Danielle Nash (Second Clerk) and Miss Christine McGrane (Committee Assistant).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to The Clerk of the Committee on Standards, Journal Office, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6615.

List of additional written evidence

(published in Volume II on the Committee's website www.parliament.uk/standards.com)

	<i>Page</i>
1 Africa All Party Parliamentary Group	Ev w1
2 John Mann MP	Ev w1
3 Sir Malcolm Bruce MP	Ev w2
4 Nicky Priaulx	Ev w2
5 Sheila Kinsella	Ev w3
6 Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots	Ev w4

Written evidence

Written evidence submitted by Africa All Party Parliamentary Group

1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee on Standard's inquiry into All Party Groups. As Chair of the Africa All Party Parliamentary Group, I participated in the discussions held by the Speakers' Working Group last spring. I am now pleased to contribute to the discussion about how to implement the Working Group Report. APPGs provide a hugely valuable and often under-rated service to the House, providing opportunities for Members to come together to work on issues of interest to them. APPGs bring together Members of both Houses. They enable MPs to learn from the experience of the House of Lords, and enable Peers to feel the pulse of elected Members, who are in touch with constituency opinion. They additionally enable Members to interact with those outside of Parliament, providing opportunities to remain in touch with the interests and needs of the broader population, which is critical if we are to represent them.

2. I fully support the need for APPGs to be transparent, and agree with the Committee on Standards and Privileges' recommendations that the threshold for registering benefits be put in line with the requirements placed on individual Members, whether this threshold changes following the review by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards or not. The Africa APPG, like many others, produces annual financial statements and would be pleased to share these with the House. While the suggested threshold for APPGs that would be required to produce financial statements, recommended as being combined financial and material benefits of over £3300 per annum, seems a sensible figure, this may be difficult to determine in practice, as many of the in-kind benefits accrued to APPGs (such as office space, access to a newsletter or a staff member helping to organise a handful of meetings a year) are not easy to monetise. Reporting such benefits as in-kind prevents inconsistencies in reporting and is more transparent, as it shows exactly what was donated.

3. I agree with the recommendation that Associate APGs be abolished; while APPGs can provide an extremely valuable role as a forum for Members to engage with those with shared interests external to Parliament, external parties should not have voting rights, and certainly not a feeling of "ownership" of a parliamentary group.

4. While the number of APPGs has increased dramatically in recent years, attempts by the House to "ration" APPGs may have negative consequences. In particular, this could be seen as an infringement of Members' independence, and is likely to affect valuable APPGs, as well as those which perhaps have less relevance to parliamentary business. The risk of having some largely inactive APPGs is of less importance than the impact that rationing might have on APPGs which do provide a useful service to the House.

5. It is important not to overstate the confusion between APPGs and Select Committees. I have been a Member of the International Development Select Committee for 12 years, and have been the Chair of the Africa APPG for 10 years, and have never been aware of confusion between the two groups, and never seen anything but cooperation where there are issues of common interest. The Africa APPG includes a description of the Group, as well as a list of its Executive Committee Members in each report, and we would be happy to expand this to make it clearer. However putting a disclaimer on the front cover of our reports would look like a "health warning" and could act to undermine our credibility, for no good reason. While we are not a Select Committee, we are a cross-party and cross-House group of Members, whose reports are respected by Government, Parliament and outside bodies, and add a high level of value to policy discussions.

6. Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. I would be delighted to discuss any of these issues with you in more detail should this be helpful.

18 March 2013

Written evidence submitted by John Mann MP

I hope the following submission will be of help to your inquiry into All-Party Groups.

I am the chairperson of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Anti-Semitism. Our group receives funding, as declared, from the Parliamentary Committee Against Anti-Semitism Foundation (PCAA). The PCAA is a registered charity (1089736) centred on the principle that the struggle against prejudice and discrimination is not just the responsibility of the victims. Its charitable objectives are up on the charity commission website (which is linked from the 'about us' section of the PCAA website at www.antisemitism.org.uk).

The relationship with the PCAA is straightforward, they support the work and activities of the APPG against Anti-Semitism, providing research, secretariat support for events, sponsoring occasional visits and helping with the publication of reports. A group secretary is funded by the PCAA. That person has an All-Party pass for Westminster. All statements, publications or events occurring under the APPG name have the authorisation of me as chairperson and involve parliamentary members.

As a small charity, it would seem a disproportionate expense for the PCAA Foundation to produce a separate set of statements of income and expenditure for its support of the APPG. Where charities are acting as

secretariats, asking for copies of the accounts as submitted to the Charity Commission would not be unreasonable. In the case of businesses, asking for the accounts submitted to Companies House on an annual basis would also be fair.

The rules outlined in your letter to Mr Speaker contained proportionate and reasonable demands for transparency from All-Party Parliamentary Groups. It should be beholden on the APPGs to follow the rules of the house and on the chairperson of an APPG to oversee such compliance. Little additional resource should be needed to ensure such procedures are in place.

In terms of restricting the number of APPGs, it might be possible to have an activity threshold to determine continuance of a group. Our APPG is incredibly active. It is worth noting though, that official meetings such as AGMs may not necessarily give a clear indication of the work a group is undertaking. Briefings with Ministers, events in local communities and individual party briefings such as our group has been involved with are of great value to members.

21 March 2013

Written evidence submitted by Sir Malcolm Bruce MP

TWITTER AND THE USE OF THE PORTCULLIS LOGO BY APPGS

As part of your inquiry into APPGs, I would like to draw to your attention a narrow, but important aspect of the issue, namely Twitter and the use of the Portcullis logo by APPGs¹.

Tweeting is now an important way for the International Development Committee to connect with interested parties, but our tweeting is drowned out by the mass of APPGs on development using the portcullis. There are about 20 development APPGs, which can affect the impact of our use of social media

To take an example, the Committee published its report on Global Food Security on Tuesday 4 June. While I was pleased with the press coverage, we were also hoping to cause a splash on Twitter. We succeeded to a degree, but were somewhat drowned out by the APPG Agriculture and Food for Development which endlessly live tweeted its Hunger & Nutrition event.

My main objection is that the APPG use the Portcullis as their Twitter 'handle' (see below), as do we—making us easily confused on the site.

One of the recommendations from last year's Speakers' Working Group on All-Party Groups that The Working Group was that:

- the portcullis should not be used by APGs on reports, websites, or correspondence to ensure APGs are not confused with official Parliamentary Committees and every APG report should carry a statement that the group is not an official Parliamentary body.

Twitter makes the issue of the use of the portcullis logo much more important since the portcullis is the first item that people notice on twitter.

While APPGs serve an important function there is an increasing tendency for them to adopt the portcullis in order to present themselves as if they were an official body of the House, comparable to the role that Select Committees perform. For this reason, I believe that clearer guidance should be given to APPGs as to the use and promotion of the portcullis for their purposes.

10 June 2013

Written evidence from Nicky Priaulx

I have been told that the Inquiry into APPGs will not be exploring specific case studies, so would limit my response to this[...]:

1. In light of my experience in relation to an Inquiry that I have subsequently found is neither official business nor clearly aligned with an APPG (but implicitly is), Inquiries which do not constitute official business should not be permitted under any circumstances to present themselves as Official Business in respect of correspondence, websites or any other material. This points however, to a second concern.
2. Peers and/or MPs undertaking a cross-party investigation of an issue where it is not official business should clearly identify which APPGs, underpin the basis of that investigation; as I have found, the failure to do this means that there is no recourse for standards investigation. Rules applying to the APPGs, which explicitly requires that APPGs make clear that their business is not official, have no application in circumstances where an APPG does not appear to form the basis of a so-called Inquiry, Committee, or Commission. Moreover, in the absence of it being official business, the standards which relate to this cannot be applied. In other words, there is a black hole into which some work

¹ https://twitter.com/APPG_Ag_F4D

being undertaken in Parliament falls, but work which is of a misleading character and is not subject to rules which apply to APPGs or Official Business.

... Documentation relating to a particular case omitted.

28 June 2013

Written evidence from Sheila Kinsella

I understand that your Committee is currently conducting yet *another* Enquiry into the lobbying practices channelled through the 'All Party Parliamentary Groups'. As far as I can see at least six such Enquiries have been held previously, and the recommendation has always been tinkering with procedure; meetings; reports; registry requirements etc. resulting in a consensus for '*more transparency*' which is a euphemism for '*let's not change anything about the system*'.

I have also noticed that it is the Commercial sponsors who are continually probed, whilst the Charitable organisations are not. Charities, particularly of the faith-based variety, are very, very serious business indeed these days. Commercial lobbying is honest, it is blatantly financially orientated and is therefore easier to regulate and sanction. Religious lobbyists on the other hand operate under the veil of benign benevolence concealing a mission of zealous intensity that is unrecognised—and vastly underestimated—by the majority, religiously-uncommitted, populous. This is particularly true in parliamentary circles as it is an area that few politicians fear to tread for fear of being branded 'discriminatory', which is dangerously naïve as there is some very aggressive behaviour afoot of which I think you, and your Committee, should be aware.

The Chair of the Committee that followed The Times revelations of 2006—Sir Philip Mawer—insightfully recognised the danger of "*the external assistance allowing outside bodies to effectively control such groups or to advance their concerns in a covert way. The key to preventing this is vigilance by members in maintaining control*" and then went on to recommend....guess what? *More 'transparency!'*

It is the phrase '*effectively control*' that I wish to bring to your attention today. The Christian All Party Parliamentary Group Registry entry currently states 'Benefits' received as '*Administrative Support, three days per week from the Bible Society (a charity)*'. This implies a bit of typing, photocopying, emailing etc. However, this vastly misrepresents the reality. 'The Bible society' is in effect a global, book publisher and distribution Corporation as well as having a zealous, Christian fundamentalist agenda and their 'sponsorship' of and 'support' for the CAPPG (CiP—Christians in Parliament, for short) is far from *charitably* motivated.

The National Prayer Breakfast for 600 attendees held in Westminster Hall in June and sponsored by the BS must have cost a fortune but is not declarable under current Parliamentary rules. However, this event was literally a '*Trade Convention*' for them. The '*administrative support*' given to the CAPPG is far from 'part time'. I attached a Job Description currently advertised which is self explanatory². Two full-time staff will be accommodated in Room 484, Portcullis House, which the last time I checked was a Government building but they will be Line-Managed by The Advocacy Director at BS's world headquarters in Swindon. One of these employees will be paid up to £28k p.a. and he will be reporting to a *Senior* Parliamentary Officer, (remuneration not specified). The lavish promotional events, and the personnel input above are not there to *assist* the CiP. This is serious '*investment*' from which the BS will expect considerable returns by way of influence over British social and educational policy. Our Parliament is merely a vehicle! Even a cursory glance at the Job Description cannot leave anyone in doubt as to the purpose and direction of their involvement and their priorities. How many employers state, '*followership*' of the *Chief Executive as leader*', as an essential employee characteristic?

It grieves me to add that the BS will not be alone in this behaviour. There will be other ultra-aggressive organisations engaging equally in what Sir Philip would call '*covert*' practices, but they are being overlooked under the stealth-like cloak of 'Charity'.

I beg your Enquiry to include these unacceptable behaviours in your work otherwise the abuse will continue to the detriment of democracy.

15 July 2013

² www.biblesociety.org.uk

Written evidence from Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts

For the record I am the Treasurer of the APPG on Extraordinary Rendition, Secretary to the APPG on Prison Reform and Vice Chairman of the APPG on Civil Society and Volunteering.

I share the widely held view that the growth in the number of APPG's in recent years could have undesirable side effects. In my view a series of questions should be answered before a group could be given APPG status. My rough and ready questions would include the following:

1. Does the Group fulfil a "real" purpose or does it exist to provide an opportunity for individual "grandstanding" or covert organisational lobbying. Questions to be answered would include evidence of holding the government to account, acting as a conduit to distribute information not otherwise available etc.
2. Is the Group properly "active"—how many meetings/members, how many attendees at meetings, does it charge a membership fee etc.
3. Is the Group self financing and/or self administered? Clearly if a Group requires/uses the services of an outside organisation that raises a series of subsidiary questions about the role and purpose of that organisation.
4. Does the Group produce proper reports, hold AGM's etc.

None of these questions are individually definitive but the answers to them as a whole will give a sense of the "direction of travel".

Finally to ensure that moribund or semi moribund APPG's are put out of their misery there needs to be an MOT test every five years.

24 July 2013
