INTRODUCTION

There are currently 65 registered Cross-Party Groups in the Scottish Parliament. 107 of the 129 MSPs are members of Cross-Party Groups and over 1000 organisations are members of and participate in the work of CPGs.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

General

Question 1: What do you understand the role of CPGs in the Scottish Parliament to be?

Allowing for information sharing and collaboration within the policy community and providing MSPs with information that aids them in scrutinising the Scottish Government in committees, in the chamber and through written questions.

Question 2: What benefits does the existence of CPGs bring to non-MSPs in terms of engagement with MSPs and the work of the Scottish Parliament?

Providing an opportunity for individuals and organisations from commerce, academia, the voluntary sector, and the arts to engage in frank and open discussion with MSPs over the future needs and ambitions of these groups to the benefit of the community as a whole.

Registration of Cross-Party Groups

Question 3: Do you consider that the Code could be clearer on the process for establishing and registering a Cross-Party Group? If so, please provide comments as to any specific elements of the process that, in your experience, could be improved.

No opinion

Question 4: The Code of Conduct requires that a Group’s overall membership profile must be “parliamentary in character”. What do you understand the term “parliamentary in character” to mean in the context of Cross-Party Groups and is the minimum requirement of 5 MSP members sufficient to meet this requirement?
The groups must operate within the rules and remit of the Scottish Parliament and its devolved responsibilities. 5 members is probably sufficient but they should be “real” not “shadow” members and should be required to attend 75% or more of the meetings.

Question 5: When applying for recognition, CPG conveners must submit two forms, one of which must be submitted in hard copy. Would it benefit CPGs if the forms were combined and electronic submission was accepted for this single form?

No opinion

Question 6: CPGs are required to register any financial or material support received from a single source in a calendar year which has a total value of more than £500. This £500 threshold is close to the threshold above which individual MSPs are required to register gifts in their Register of Interests. Do you consider that the £500 threshold is appropriate and should be retained?

Yes

Question 7: The Rules on All-Party Groups at Westminster require that, where secretariat services are provided by a consultancy or a charity/not-for-profit organisation, the relevant organisation must agree to make certain information available on request. The information for a consultancy firm is its full client list and for a charity/not-for-profit organisation is a list of any commercial company which has made a donation or donations of more than £5,000 in the twelve months prior to the request being made.

Should a similar requirement be introduced for CPGs?

Yes

Question 8: Following a general election, CPGs have 90 days within which they can re-register, provided that there is no significant change to the information registered in the previous Session. Due to the changes in MSPs that arise following an election, the process that must be followed for re-registration is largely similar to that for the initial registration of a Group. The Parliamentary timetable also means that the re-registration period carries into the summer recess, during which the election of office bearers cannot be carried out, meaning that CPGs wishing to re-register must arrange and hold their first meetings before the start of the recess.

What are your views on whether—

the re-registration provision should be retained, and if so

Yes

the re-registration period should exclude days when the Parliament is in recess?
No

**Operation of Cross-Party Groups**

Question 9: The Code states that “to maintain and guarantee the Parliamentary nature of CPG meetings, at least 2 MSP members of a Group must be present at every meeting”. Is the 2 MSP quorum sufficient to ensure the Parliamentary nature of CPG meetings? Should there be a requirement that the MSPs present should represent more than one of the political parties represented on the Group?

*The quorum should be increased to 3 MSP members and MSPs from at least 2 political parties should be present*

Question 10: Should CPGs be required to hold a minimum number of meetings per year? If so, what should the minimum number be?

*One meeting every six weeks allowing for 3 meetings in each session Autumn, Spring, and Summer*

Question 11: All Groups are required to hold an annual general meeting and to elect office bearers every twelve months. As Groups must elect officer bearers for the purpose of both initial registration and re-registration, do you consider that there would be any benefits to introducing a single date by which all Groups must hold their AGM? For example, if the Parliament’s first meeting of a Session was on 11 May, would the 11 May in each successive year be a suitable date by which an AGM must be held?

*No opinion*

Question 12: The Code currently provides that there are limitations on the use of Parliamentary resources to support CPG meetings. What are your views on these limitations?

(Note: this does not apply to CPG events which are subject to the same terms and conditions as any other MSP-sponsored event held under the SPCB events policy.)

*There should be sufficient resources for the groups to be facilitated without placing financial and staffing burdens on the parliament’s budget.*

**Regulation of Cross-Party Groups**

Question 13: The Convener of a Group is held primarily responsible for ensuring that the Group operates in compliance with the Code of Conduct and has to sign a declaration to that effect. Do you have any views on whether this should continue or if the provisions should be changed to extend the responsibility to all MSP office bearers of a Group?

*Change to all office bearers.*
Question 14: Groups are required to provide an annual report (submitted within 30 days of their AGM) which includes current membership and membership changes, a financial statement, the number of meetings held and any additional information that the Group wishes to provide. Should Groups be required to include additional information, such as the topics discussed at each meeting, number of MSP and non-MSP attendees and details of any reports or papers published by the Group?

Yes

Question 15: At present, the SPPA Committee has not delegated to the Standards clerks any role in ensuring that CPGs are aware of and comply with the key rules relating to the administration of CPGs. What are your views on whether it would be of assistance to CPGs if the Standards clerks were to perform such a role in relation to matters such as the notification of CPG meetings, updates to registration details and deadlines for submission of documentation?

No opinion

Question 16: Do you have any other comments on the operation of the CPG system in the Scottish Parliament?

The CPG System performs a very valuable role in delivering exchanges of views of a non-political nature across all matters relating to the life and work of Scotland which leads to a very positive form of government.

NEIL PHILLIPS
POSITIVE SOLUTIONS
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