General

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

Cross-Party Groups (CPGs) provide an opportunity for members of all parties, outside organisations and members of the public to meet and discuss a shared interest in a particular cause or subject that is topical or relevant to Scotland and the organisations that operate within it.

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?

The strength of the CPG Food is its broad membership, spanning many external organisations across the food supply chain. This means there are very wide ranging informed debates across issues that are important to those organisations and our MSP conveners.

The CPG Food has five Co-Convenors from across the political parties which means that there is engagement across the party spectrum. CPG meetings can often lead to letters to Ministers from the whole group about issues. Non MSP members appreciate the opportunity to share points of view, discuss and challenge policy and network with other stakeholders as well as MSPs.

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.

The Code is clear on the establishment and registration of a Cross-Party Group, however use of a standard registration form could be of benefit to assist in ensuring that information is provided according to the Code and hence easier to evaluate by the Standards Committee.

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?
We understand “parliamentary in character” in this context to refer to the need for the involvement of MSPs in each CPG. Their role being to serve the public interest and participate accordingly.

The minimum requirement of 5 MSPs is sufficient to meet this requirement.

**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?

Yes.

**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?

The CPG Food has not any experience of receipt of financial support.

**Question 7:** The Rules on All-Party Groups at Westminster require that, where secretariat services are provided by a consultancy or by 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?

This could be onerous on the charities or companies involved and may act as a barrier for commercial reasons of some organisations getting involved in administering CPGs.

**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
  - the re-registration period should exclude days when the Parliament is in recess?
Re-registration should be retained; it provides a timely opportunity to review the purpose and objectives of each CPG. Excluding the period of Parliamentary recess in the re-registration time bar is helpful in allowing suitable time for the CPG to arrange the necessary election of office bearers.

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 2 MSP quorum is a practical figure as MSPs often cannot commit to coming to a CPG until the last minute and may only attend for part of a meeting. It is preferable for more than one political party to be represented within this quorum.

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

There should be no minimum number as external events often dictate how often Groups meet.

**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?

We cannot see an advantage in this added requirement.

**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.)

The limitations are reasonable and in line with the need to balance the support of the CPGs and protects the use of public funded services.

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?

We think the Convenor should retain responsibility.

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?

We think that the contents of all CPG annual reports should be standard, as simple as possible and provide information of interest to the public and relevant stakeholders.

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?

This would be useful and helpful.

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

No

CROSS-PARTY GROUPS
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