Cancer Research UK provides the secretariat for the Cross Party Group on Cancer. This response is provided in this context. In submitting our views, we are happy for them to be made public, including publication on the Parliament’s website.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

General

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

The role of CPGs is to bring together MSPs and external stakeholders with an interest in a particular topic to discuss relevant issues. The group can inform MSPs about a particular subject, allow them to hear from experts in a given field, and provide an opportunity for other stakeholders to ask for MSPs’ support on an issue.

*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?

CPGs provide an opportunity for non-MSPs to engage with MSPs on topics of interest to them. They provide a time-effective way of reaching multiple MSPs who have self-identified as having an interest in a given topic by attending the meeting, and for smaller organisations or individuals without dedicated resources to engage with parliamentarians, CPGs are an effective way of making contact with 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 process for establishing and registering a Cross-Party Group.

*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?

‘Parliamentary in character’ is taken to mean that the group must be led by MSPs, that all meetings must be attended by MSPs and that the topics discussed at the meeting are relevant to parliamentary business.

**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, making it possible for form(s) to be submitted electronically would be beneficial in reducing administration time.

**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 £500 threshold is appropriate and should be retained.

**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?

We understand that in Westminster this rule applies to any donations made to the secretariat for the use of the group (for example, for support for a special event or report publication). We currently receive such donations to support the Scotland Against Cancer conference which we arrange on behalf of the Cross-Party Group on Cancer. We would be happy to comply with such a requirement.

**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 reregistration 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?

We agree that the re-registration provision is necessary due to the changes in MSPs that arise following an election, and should therefore be retained. Where a group loses its office bearers following an election, it can take some time to establish whether other MSPs are willing to take on responsibility for the group, and to therefore meet the re-registration criteria. Therefore, it would be helpful if the re-registration period excluded days when the Parliament is in recess, to allow groups additional time to hold their first meetings either before or shortly after summer recess.

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?

We believe that the 2 MSP quorum is sufficient. Given the competition for MSPs’ time it is often very difficult for groups to have additional MSPs present at all meetings. While we agree that the overall MSP membership should be cross-party in nature, it is not always possible to confirm attendance for MSPs from more than one political party at each meeting, and this requirement could lead to meetings having to be cancelled at short notice.

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

We don’t believe that CPGs should be required to hold a minimum number of meetings per year as this could lead to unnecessary meetings being held, wasting MSPs’ time. As an annual general meeting is required in order to continue registration, all groups already have to hold at least one meeting per year.

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 don’t believe that there are benefits to introducing a single date by which all Groups must hold their AGM. Furthermore, one of the most challenging aspects for groups is securing available rooms for meetings - this could create
a bottle-neck in room bookings, meaning that some groups may miss the deadline.

**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 Code is clear on the limitations on the use of Parliamentary resources, and we are happy with those.

**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?

It would be helpful if the responsibility for compliance with the Code of Conduct and signing the declaration was extended to all MSP office bearers. This would be helpful for situations where the named Convener is unwell or unable to undertake this responsibility within the required timescales. This would help to avoid unnecessary delays or issues with the re-registration process.

**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 currently provide such information on our annual report, and we would therefore be happy for this to be made a requirement.

**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?

We have always found the Standards clerks to be very helpful in dealing with any queries we have about the administration of CPGs. It would make sense for this role to be specifically dedicated to them.
Question 16: Do you have any other comments on the operation of the CPG system in the Scottish Parliament?

No.

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