I welcome the opportunity to make this personal response to the above review. It is offered from the perspective of being secretary of the Cross Party Group on Dyslexia.

**Question 1**

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

Cross Party Groups provide an opportunity to bring together MSPs and those with a professional or personal interest in the specific subject e.g. dyslexia. The key purpose is to provide a platform to inform MSPs about the subject matter and its impact on those who are impacted by 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?

CPGs provide an important way of demonstrating the commitment of the Scottish Parliament to have structures which enable people to inform the work of the Parliament. It gives non-MSPs the opportunity to raise their own awareness of developments, trends and common issues across Scotland. It also provides direct access to MSPs in order that non-MSPs have confidence that the impact of the CPG subject on individuals, families and communities will be understood by MSPs and help them with their work within the Scottish Parliament and within their constituencies.

**Question 3**

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

The Code of Conduct provides clear information on the registration process.

**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
to mean in the context of Cross Party Groups and is the minimum requirement of 5 MSP members sufficient to meet the requirement?

The term suggests that the membership should include individuals and organisations who are able to contribute towards meeting the purpose of the Group, providing a platform for MSPs to raise their awareness and understanding of the subject area.

**Question 5**

When applying for recognition, CPG conveners must submit two forms, one of which must be submitted 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 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 of 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?

Transparency is vital in all aspects of the work of CPGs but as long as the integrity of the consultancy or charity/ not for profit organisation is beyond doubt, there is no need to introduce unnecessary 'red tape'. Self-regulation by the CPGs should be sufficient to ensure best practice.

**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 must be followed for re-registration is largely similar to that for the initial registration of the Group. The Parliamentary timetable also means that the re-registration process 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 meeting before the start of the recess.

What are your views on whether-

- The re-registration provision should be retained, and is so
- The re-registration period should exclude days when the parliament is in recess?

In practice, the actual period available to undertake the process of securing membership by MSPs is very limited given that the days and perhaps first weeks immediately following an election are taken up with higher priorities for parties and the Parliament in allocating places on committees etc. The pressure to secure membership to CPGs can result in MSPs being approached by a range of re-registering CPGs and can result in uncertainty and time delays which make it difficult for ensuring everything is in place to hold an initial meeting before summer recess.

It is difficult to suggest an alternative method other than ensuring MSPs understand the requirements by CPGs to have their membership confirmed and to have held their first meeting before the summer recess.

‘Recess’ is a holiday period and should not be included in parliamentary business timetable. Consideration should be given as to whether the requirement to hold a meeting to appoint office bearers needs to take place before the recess. Where a CPG is re-registering, the existing office bearers could hold interim positions until the first meeting is held within a stated period immediately after recess.

**Question 9**

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

The MSP quorum is sufficient to ensure the Parliamentary nature of CPG meetings.

Ensuring attendance of MSPs from more than one party is desirable but should not be mandatory. If there are concerns about representation or attendance by MSPs, this should be a matter addressed through self-regulation by the CPG, if necessary through the Convener.
Question 10

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

In order to fulfil its stated purpose and to acknowledge and recognise its value to the Parliamentary business, there should be a minimum number of 4 meetings per year.

Question 11

All Groups are required to hold an annual general meeting and elect office bearers every twelve months. As Groups must elect officer bearers for the purpose of both initial; 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?

It may be preferable to make the requirement that an AGM should take place no later than a specified date in mid-June each year.

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?

The accessibility and support of the Convener's Assistant is crucial in ensuring the smooth operation of the CPG. It would be useful to develop a ‘Guide for Secretary’s of CPGs’ in terms of what support can be expected from the office of the Convener in order to ensure consistency of support across CPGs.

Question 13

The Convener of a Group is held 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?

There is a case for all MSP office bearers signing a similar declaration which would further evidence the importance of CPGs in terms of the Parliamentary business and demonstrate the personal commitment of MSP office bearers.

Question 14

Groups are required to provide an annual report (within 30 days of the 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?

This is dependent on what the purpose of the ‘Report’ is and how the information will be used. If it is to provide data on e.g. the issues raised and discussed or attendance levels to enable analyse and comparison across CPGs then there may be value in including such data. If it is a record of the work of the CPG then the existing content would sufficient.

**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 a role in relation to matters such as the notification of CPG meetings, updates to registration details and deadlines for submission of documentation?

It would be extremely helpful if the clerks could forward the details of meetings to all MSPs. An alternative would be to forward an electronic email list of all MSPs to CPG secretaries.

As with an earlier suggestion of the development of a ‘Guide for CPG Secretaries’ regarding the role of the Convener’s Assistant with CPGs, the guide could also include the support available from the clerk's office e.g. in relation to minutes on websites etc. and deadlines such as AGMs and report content.

**Question 16**

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

It is recognised that MSPs have significant workloads and are not always able to attend meetings. This must be balanced with an acknowledgement by MSPs of the commitment of non-MSP members who, in many cases, travel significant distances on a voluntary basis for meetings which are relatively short. There is a danger that the difficulties experienced by MSPs in attending meeting is wrongly perceived as an indicator of the value placed on the work of the Group.

DAVID JONES
SECRETARY
CROSS PARTY GROUP ON DYSLEXIA
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