

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO LOBBYING

SUBMISSION RECEIVED FROM THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF ACCIDENTS (ROSPA)

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) thanks the committee for giving it an opportunity to offer its views on this inquiry.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), the UK's top safety charity, has a long history of campaigning successfully on issues that have the power to protect millions of individuals. From awareness campaigns that highlight how people are killed and hurt in accidents, to calling for changes in law, RoSPA is committed to standing up for safety.

Our mission is to save lives and reduce injuries by preventing accidents on the road, at work, in the home and at leisure. For more information about RoSPA (which has offices in Edinburgh, Birmingham, Cardiff, and Belfast) visit www.rosipa.com.

RoSPA believes in the importance of using evidence – which enables accident prevention issues to be identified, campaigns to be prioritised and the impact of interventions to be measured – and also that prevention should be in proportion to the risk.

The passion to protect has been there from our inception. In 1917, a campaign for pedestrians to walk facing oncoming traffic led to a 70 per cent fall in road deaths. We were also instrumental in the introduction of the first seat belt law in 1983, with the compulsory wearing of seatbelts thought to have saved at least 60,000 lives. More recently, we called for the use of mobile phones while driving to be banned, with the use of hand-held phones at the wheel subsequently made illegal in 2003.

Other RoSPA campaigns have included: a five-year drive that persuaded the government to make it mandatory for all domestic appliances to be sold with fitted plugs; a successful safety glass and fire-resistant foam furnishing campaigns, and our ongoing drink-drive crusade, part of which involves calling for a lower drink-drive limit.

RoSPA is concerned that insufficient interest is currently being given to the prevention of accidents - not least because they continue to be the leading cause of early, preventable death for most of our lives, killing about 14,000 people across the UK each year.

Because of the scale of the problem, our campaign work must be free to continue highlighting the importance of government coordination, the effective gathering and use of data, and the range of effective measures that can be applied to the prevention of accidents.

RoSPA lobbies decision-makers in several ways, most notably by: providing the secretariat to the Cross/All Party Groups on Accident Prevention in the Scottish

Parliament and in the Houses of Parliament; trying to influence the election manifestos of political parties; backing Bills and providing questions and statements to be used by representatives in elected chambers, and responding - where appropriate - to government consultations.

Our aim is to provide advice and information that is proportionate and based on evidence. Underpinning this aim is our commitment to openness and independence.

RoSPA believes that the right to campaign sits at the heart of UK democracy. Charities and other voluntary groups have a strong tradition of bringing people together to lobby on the issues that affect them, using their knowledge and expertise to shape and challenge public policy where appropriate. Good legislation requires the involvement of the people it affects.

RoSPA is against any action that would limit the ability of citizens to hold government and elected chambers to account, while diminishing public involvement in policy development.

RoSPA is worried that its current approach to lobbying might be threatened by Part II of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill (or "the Lobbying Bill"), which represents a significant restriction of campaigning activity during election periods and in its current form, could prevent charities and other voluntary groups from engaging in public policy issues and speaking out on behalf of the people they support.

While this Bill is not the product of the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood might be wondering what position to adopt in relation to it if Scotland becomes an independent country following a referendum on Thursday September 18, 2014.

From our point of view, the provisions of the Bill remain too broad in scope, giving substantial discretion to the Electoral Commission, and there remains a significant amount of uncertainty about whether and when these rules will apply.

This could have a decisive impact not only on the right to campaign but also on the independence of the voluntary sector. It is this independence - of purpose, voice and action - that makes the voluntary sector essential to the democratic process, enabling it to serve the interests of those who might otherwise be left without support or a voice.

We believe that the Lobbying Bill has yet to achieve the right balance between achieving greater transparency and establishing a proportionate approach that exorcises the type of activity that may have an undue influence on the political process.

Overall it has not yet been made clear why the rules that apply to political parties should apply to non-party campaigners who operate for different reasons, and in different ways, to those that seek election.

The Bill has implications for the rights to freedom of association and speech, as highlighted by the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and by the legal

opinion provided to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) by Helen Mountfield QC.

The Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement says there are six tests for good regulation:

1. Avoid undue influence on elections by making transparent the practices of those engaged in activity that could influence an election
2. Make any impact on the campaigning activities of non-party organisations proportionate (including the impact of any regulatory burden)
3. Provide evidence and be able to demonstrate the need for regulation and an understanding of its impact
4. Make clear its meaning
5. Ensure that it is practical, making it easier for non-party organisations to understand and implement
6. Ensure that it is enforceable by the Electoral Commission, as the regulator.

In short, RoSPA hopes that the Scottish Parliament would reflect on the importance of these tests if it considered making any changes to lobbying practices in Scotland following the independence referendum in September 2014.

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