Introduction

The Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) is the industry’s representative organisation. Its 51 member companies – Scotch Whisky distillers, blenders and bottlers – account for over 90% of Scotch Whisky production and sales.

The SWA assisted a number of MSPs in the setting up of a Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Scotch Whisky in September 2011. The main purpose of the CPG on Scotch Whisky is to ensure a better understanding of Scotch Whisky – one of Scotland’s leading export industries – among members of the Scottish Parliament. The industry plays a key role in Scotland with regards to the economy, exports, jobs, tourism, the environment and tackling alcohol misuse. This Group provides the forum to discuss and answer questions on these important issues with MSPs from all parties alongside key people from within the Scotch Whisky industry.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Question 1

CPGs act as a forum for MSPs, external organisations and members of the public interested in a particular field to discuss and act on issues of valuable importance to Scotland, the Scottish economy and to society.

Question 2

The existence of CPGs allows non-MSPs to engage directly with MSPs to discuss issues of importance to the particular nature of the CPG. It aids understanding of the political process for outsiders while broadening and raising knowledge and awareness of MSPs on important issues. The CPG on Scotch Whisky allows for a wide range of topics which relate to Scotch Whisky to be explored and understood. It is a way to offer MSPs non-political guidance to help them make informed decisions and effectively scrutinise the Scottish Government in committees, ask written questions and better understand the national and local impact of the industry.

Question 3

The Code of Practice has two sections which relate to CPGs and these should perhaps be streamlined into one (Volume 2, Section 6: Regulation of Cross-Party Groups and Volume 3, Section 6: Regulation of Cross-Party Groups).
Question 4

“Parliamentary in character” suggests membership is drawn from several political parties. It would allow where appropriate MSPs to progress an issue or idea through the Parliament such as drawing attention to a matter which has secured broad support through a motion, written question or piece of legislation.

Given the volume of CPGs, 5 MSP members would appear balanced and sufficient. Given the pressure on MSPs’ time a higher threshold would appear unrealistic.

Question 5

It would seem reasonable and less bureaucratic that an electronic copy would be sufficient if a confirmation receipt could be sent.

Question 6

With only recent experience in the arrangements for conducting a CPG and the full calendar year not being yet through, the £500 threshold appears rather low for a Group to function without bureaucracy. Perhaps the threshold should be extended to £1000.

Question 7

This would not affect the running of a CPG run by the SWA, a trade association. However, to avoid bureaucracy we would suggest only information relevant to the work of that particular CPG is required to be provided.

Question 8

It would seem reasonable to offer an extension to the re-registration of CPGs to exclude recess days.

Operation of Cross-Party Groups

Question 9

Having 2 MSPs present offers a balance. Given the current political landscape and pressure on MSPs’ time, it is difficult to impose a requirement such as having representation of more than one of the political parties.

Question 10

To maintain momentum and interest, CPGs should hold at least one meeting in a year. However, some periods will be more active than others therefore putting a greater minimum requirement could be restrictive.
Question 11

Choosing particular fixed dates is a complicated task as diaries continue to change. It would be reasonable to offer a one month “grace” period on the deadline for flexibility.

Question 12

As an external organisation, there is a lot of reliance on the resource of MSP offices to assist with room bookings, sorting out guests and catering, organising access to the Parliament, setting up audio visual facilities. If the external Secretariat had a visitor pass and ability to take care of these matters, the burden on Parliament resources would be uplifted.

Alternatively, if the Parliament wished to retain some control, the original booking could be made by an MSP, with the logistical arrangements then taken forward by an external group/individual.

Regulation of Cross-Party Groups

Question 13

Reasonable rule to continue with the current method.

Question 14

The current requirements to provide an annual report are reasonable.

Question 15

The SWA considers it very useful if there were to be a main point of call in charge of this area to offer guidance and to ensure key rules are being adhered to.

Question 16

It would be useful to have an initial “CPG set-up meeting” with someone from the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to go through the rules and limitations of CPGs.

SCOTCH WHISKY ASSOCIATION
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