Introductory Note

In the following submission the answers to all the questions in the Consultation document are set out in exactly the same order in which the questions appear in the Consultation document itself. For this reason the text of the questions has not been repeated in my submission.

Question 1

I believe that CPGs fulfil a number of important functions. They provide a unique forum in which members of the public and organisations can meet together with MSPs in order to discuss and share information regarding a common interest in a specific subject or issue. Moreover, CPGs are much more than just ‘talking shops’. They can invite expert speakers in the fields in question so that the group as a whole can learn more about key points and up-to-date developments. The group also has the opportunity to question the speakers directly about specific matters or concerns. Furthermore, the assured presence of MSPs facilitates informed discussion on the making of proposals to introduce or amend legislation affecting the issue under consideration.

Question 2

The existence of CPGs brings to non-MSPs the unique benefit of participation in the actual presence of MSPs. This allows for direct discussion, asking of questions and hearing about the current work of the Scottish Parliament and its Committees and the Scottish Government in relation to the particular topic under consideration by the CPGs. This may in turn motivate the non-MSPs to consider the possibility of applying to attend Committee meetings (if the meetings in question are open to the public) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issue at stake.

Question 3

I feel that there are a couple of points where the code could be clearer on the process of establishing and registering a Cross-Party Group, i.e.:-

at 6.3.1, 4th bullet point: Does “all members” mean “all MSP members”? If so, this should be stated.

at 6.3.1, 7th bullet point: For the sake of greater transparency, would it be possible to outline very briefly the nature of these “certain details”? 
**Question 4**

In the context of Cross-Party Groups, I understand the term “parliamentary in character” to comprise the following three features: first, CPGs must include MSPs in their membership; second, the MSP members should be drawn from the full range of political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament; and third, there must be a certain quorum of MSPs at all meetings of the Group.

I believe that, realistically, the minimum requirement of 5 MSP members is sufficient to meet the “parliamentary in character” requirement. While it might seem attractive to require a larger number, this could prove to be difficult to implement in practice.

Given the large number of Cross-Party Groups (67 CPGs plus 4 pending recognition and 5 proposed1) in proportion to the comparatively small number of MSPs (129), it could be difficult to satisfy a requirement of more than 5. Given all the duties and activities of the MSPs it would seem possible that getting more than 5 signed up for each group could pose practical difficulties.

**Question 5**

Yes, I believe that it would benefit CPGs if the forms were combined and electronic submission was accepted for this single form. This would simplify the process and cut down on paper consumption.

**Question 6**

Yes, I would consider that the threshold of £500 is appropriate and reasonable and that it should be retained.

**Question 7**

Yes, I believe that a similar requirement should be introduced for CPGs. It is an important element in the requirement for transparency and accountability in the operation of the Groups.

**Question 8**

I believe that the re-registration provisions should be retained because they provide a means of keeping track of CPGs with the passage of time.

Because of its length (some 9 weeks), the summer recess does eat way a substantial part of the re-registration period. For this reason, it would seem fairer for the re-registration period of exclude days when the Parliament is in recess.

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1 Figures obtained from [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk) on 7 March 2012.
Question 9

I would consider that, for practical reasons, the quorum of 2 MSPs should be regarded as adequate. Given the large number of CPGs in relation to the number of MSPs (as described above in the answer to Question 4), plus the myriad other duties of MSPs, a larger quorum could prove to be unworkable.

In line with the requirement for CPGs to be “parliamentary in character”, I believe that the 2 MSPs present should represent different political parties.

Question 10

Yes, in principle, CPGs should be expected to hold a minimum number of meetings per year. This would help to ensure that they are actually undertaking the work to which they committed themselves upon their registration.

The minimum number of meetings per year should be two or three. While this should be a general requirement, I also believe that it should not be totally rigid in its application. There should be some scope for flexibility, e.g. in instances where there are genuine and good reasons for a reduced frequency of meetings in a particular year.

Question 11

The introduction of this single date sounds reasonable, as it could streamline the system and make it easier to keep track of the AGMs of the Groups. I think that there is, however, a shadow of a doubt as to whether this would actually work in practice. Therefore, if it were to be introduced, could this change possibly be subject to a trial run?

Question 12

Parliamentary resources are not unlimited and, accordingly, in the circumstances, the current limitations are reasonable.

Question 13

Yes, I believe that it would be a good idea to extend responsibility for compliance with the Code of Conduct to all MSP office bearers of a Group. This would enhance accountability for the operation of the Group. Also, it would be a good practical measure for ensuring compliance, particularly in circumstances where the capacity of the Convener is reduced, e.g. due to illness, etc.

Question 14

Yes indeed, it would be very beneficial if Groups were required to include additional information such as the topics discussed at each meeting, the number of MSPs and non-MSP attendees and the details of any reports or papers published by the Group. This would enhance transparency in the
operation of CPGs and increase the opportunity for engagement of the public with the work being carried out by them.

**Question 15**

I would consider that the CPGs would be benefited by the assistance of the Standards Clerks in ensuring that they are aware of, and compliant with, with key rules applicable to them. This provision would lend concrete support to the CPGs in their endeavours to operate according to the rules.

**Question 16**

All I would say here is that I sincerely believe that the CPG system in the Scottish Parliament provides a valuable forum for confronting important and often difficult issues and for opening up avenues for moving forward with improvements. Accordingly, it is of great value to individuals, groups and to society as a whole. Therefore I hope that the system will continue to thrive and to develop further in its important role.

**DR. PATRICIA GAIL SALUJA**  
**19 MARCH 2012**