



CORRUPTION IN UK POLITICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

If leaders in government, politics, business and elsewhere are perceived as corrupt, this has a corrosive effect throughout the system

Politics is a difficult profession, but the public expects high ethical standards from political leaders, not more excuses

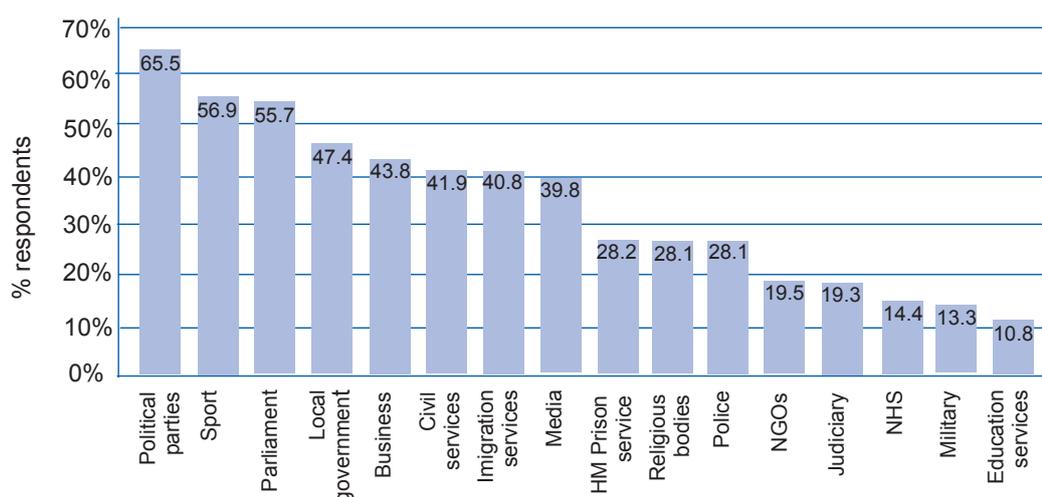
In 2010-11, TI-UK carried out a comprehensive survey on the prevalence of corruption in the UK. In a Report divided into three parts, entitled respectively *National Opinion Survey* ('the Survey'), *Assessment of Key Sectors* ('Key Sectors Assessment'), and a *National Integrity System Assessment* ('NIS Assessment'), the nature and extent of corruption in the UK was examined. The Report was accompanied by an overview entitled *Overview and Policy Recommendations* ('Overview'). In our Report we noted that:

'... a robust 'national integrity system' ...provides checks and balances to those in power, whether elected representatives, economic power, or power in other forms. Tone from the top is particularly important: if leaders in government, politics, business and elsewhere are perceived as corrupt, this has a corrosive effect throughout the system.'

We concluded that although the NIS assessment found that key pillars of the UK's national integrity were robust, there were notable weaknesses. In our opinion 'some of our most trusted institutions are vulnerable and there are inadequate procedures to detect and prevent corruption'.

We went on to say that the research suggested that UK political parties and parliament were two of three areas that were particularly vulnerable to corruption – alongside sport. This was reflected in the public opinion survey we had commissioned:

To what extent do you perceive the following categories in this country to be affected by corruption?



This paper highlights the areas of UK politics which are especially vulnerable to corruption, outlines the nature of the problem, and makes policy recommendations. Some of the reforms we propose have been under discussion for years, without much being achieved because of a lack of political will. We understand that politics is a difficult profession, but the public expects high ethical standards from political leaders, not more excuses

2. THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Historically, the UK's parliament has had a high international reputation, and the UK has been well placed on international corruption indices. However, politics in the UK has recently been plagued by corruption scandals and public trust in politicians is plunging. There have been too many scandals, often because of a lack of transparency and accountability. Recent scandals include:

- **Cash for access:** the resignation of the Conservative Party's co-treasurer after it was revealed that he offered access to the Prime Minister and Chancellor (as well as the policy committee at No 10 Downing Street) for up to £250,000; he also indicated how laws against funding political parties from foreign sources could be circumvented.
- **News International:** allegations in the wake of the phone hacking enquiry that the influence of Rupert Murdoch and his newspapers significantly distorted UK politicians' political decision making.
- **Parliamentarians' expenses:** the abuse of expenses by various members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
- **Cash for honours:** following the 2006 scandal, a simmering suspicion that party donors are rewarded with seats in the House of Lords; there have been many individual allegations.
- **Peers for sale:** the secret recording of members of the House of Lords offering to influence legislation for a fee at the request of private clients.
- **Cabs for hire:** the secret recording of former government ministers offering to sell access to government decision makers to private consultants.
- **Consultancy loophole:** the allegation that former ministers are exploiting a loophole in rules governing the revolving door between government and business in order to conceal the names of private clients they are working for.
- **Self-interested legislation:** the exposure by the Guardian of how a serving government minister potentially stood to profit personally from legislation he was piloting in the House of Commons – this forced the minister to declare interests that he had failed to disclose.

These scandals have exposed serious fault lines in Britain's political system, raising particular concerns about:

- Political party funding;
- Lobbying of politicians by those who can apparently buy access that influences legislation, spending priorities or policy decisions;
- The regime for parliamentary expenses;
- Conflicts of interest;
- The revolving door between government and business; and
- Oversight regimes.

Each of these is addressed in this paper, with the exception of the Revolving Door, which is addressed in a separate TI-UK policy paper.

An interesting feature of these scandals is that in many cases, the behaviour falls within the existing rules, even though they are at times stretched to breaking point. This suggests that the imposition of more rules may work to an extent, but at heart is a greater issue and a greater concern. This is the willingness and ability of UK politicians to act in an unethical manner and put their private interests ahead of the public interest, showing scant regard for the Nolan Principles of Public Life (these are: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership). If politicians are to have legitimacy as lawmakers, they need to be exemplars of personal integrity. Rules must be complied with, not merely because there are penalties for not doing so, but because MPs are expected to have a system of values in which integrity is required for all aspects of their conduct.

Common threads linking political scandals are ethical failures fuelled by money (often in the form of business, whether business means the City, the media, a factory in the constituency or private consultancies). There is also the related question of whether the bodies, which are charged with ensuring that the letter and spirit of the rules are upheld, are functioning effectively. This collective failure falls well within the Transparency International definition of corruption as 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain'.

Overall, there seem to be several things that are going wrong: weaknesses and ambiguities in rules are exploited; the rules are enforced too weakly; and at times there is a culture that leads politicians to make excuses to themselves that justify corrupt and unethical conduct.

Whatever the causes, it is not possible to ignore the fact that the steady stream of political corruption scandals in recent years has eroded public confidence not just in individual politicians, but also in political institutions. There is a danger that the public will cease to regard decisions made by government and parliament as legitimate and fair. This represents a serious threat to our democracy and, ultimately, to the rule of law.

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3. KEY AREAS OF WEAKNESS

3.1 POLITICAL PARTY FUNDING

Political parties are essential to democracy. They foster debate on policy and provide voters with a way of expressing their preferences. They also provide an entry point for individuals who wish to become politically active, and they support them if they wish to pursue political careers. To do all of this, and to compete in elections, they need funding, all the more so because traditional income sources such as membership dues and trade union subscriptions are declining.

However, parties also exercise influence and can be extremely powerful. This raises risks that funders will expect gratitude in the form of special influence, and that parties will allow themselves to be influenced in return for much-needed funds.

Indeed, political party funding has been at the heart of many political corruption scandals in the UK. The 'cash for access' scandal in March 2012 showed how the absence of a cap on donations to political parties was a major source of vulnerability to corruption. In 2006-07, in the 'cash for honours' scandal, it was revealed that several men who had been nominated for peerages by then prime minister Tony Blair had loaned large amounts of money to the Labour Party. Loans, unlike donations, do not by law have to be declared, providing they are made at a commercial rate of interest. Blair denied that there was any connection between the loans and the peerage nominations. The Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats were also revealed to have taken large loans from wealthy individuals.

Despite several steps towards reform,¹ political party financing remains a major source of concern in the UK. The TI-UK National Opinion Survey found that political parties were judged the most corrupt among a list of key sectors of UK public life.

There is particular concern that a handful of wealthy individuals and organisations might be able to buy influence or position through making large donations. Indeed, £250m of the £432m donated to political parties between 2001 and mid 2010 was from single donations of more than £100,000 made by individuals, companies or unions.²

In another recent survey, one-third of respondents thought that special favours are 'very often' granted for individuals or organisations making large donations, while around half thought this happened sometimes. Moreover, 42% of voters believe donations of more than £100,000 are designed to gain access and influence over the party.³ Indeed political parties themselves agree that there is a problem. All three major parties made commitments to reform party financing in their pre-election manifestos prior to the 2010 general election.

1. A more robust and transparent framework has been constructed through various laws, in particular the Political Parties and Referendums Act 2000, the Electoral Administration Act 2006, and the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009.

2. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/nov/22/party-funding-shakeup-rejection-promises>

3. *Survey of Public Attitudes*, Committee on Standards in Public Life, September 2011. http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/Library/PRESS_NOTICE_ANNUAL_REPORT_AND_RESEARCH_150911.pdf

Political party funding has been at the heart of many political corruption scandals in the UK

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TI-UK first analysed this issue in a report in 2006,⁴ and many of our recommendations from then still stand – indicating that little has changed in the meanwhile. In order to make political party funding less vulnerable to corruption, there is a need for a balanced package of reforms that would: promote transparency and accountability; introduce a cap on donations; reduce expenditure on elections; incentivise political parties to increase their engagement with the electorate and attract smaller donations from a larger number of donors; and allow for consideration of a modest increase in state funding, if this is essential to reduce corruption risks and maintain effective democracy.

TI-UK makes the following recommendations:

Donations and funding

- The introduction of a cap of £10,000 on donations (per donor per year), encouraging parties to build broader-based support. TI-UK originally made this recommendation in 2006. The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) has recommended a similar ceiling.⁵
- There should be greater transparency in corporate donations. As recommended by the CSPL, private companies donating to political parties should declare their ultimate ownership and be able to demonstrate that their owners would be permissible donors if they had given the same money directly.⁶
- A detailed examination should be undertaken by the Electoral Commission of the impact of the following two measures designed to increase participation by the electorate in party activities including funding:
 - match-funding by the state for constituency-level fundraising activities through a tax credit system;
 - progressive tax relief on individual donations under £200 – to encourage political parties to rely more on small donors and therefore to re-engage in grass-roots activities (e.g. higher rate tax relief for a £50 donation);
- A ban on all loans, credit facilities and security arrangements provided to a political party other than those on commercial terms from recognised commercial institutions.

Expenditure

- A lower ceiling (compared to the current one of £19 million) on overall election spending by parties at the national level, reducing the compulsion for parties to raise so much money. The CSPL has recommended a reduction of the current ceiling by around 15%.⁷

4. Corruption and the Funding of UK Political Parties, Transparency International UK, 2006.

Available at: <http://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/9-2006-publications>.

5. 'Political Party Finance: Ending the big donor culture', Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2011.

Available at: http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/Library/13th_Report___Political_party_finance_FINAL_PDF_VERSION_18_11_11.pdf

TI-UK agrees with the recommendation of the CSPL that affiliated unions or other bodies that contribute fees to the Labour party, could, if they wish, change their procedures so the fees could be regarded as an aggregation of individual payments, to which the cap applies individually and not collectively. However, this means that individual members of the affiliated body would have to make a positive decision to contribute to the Labour Party by opting in to the affiliation payment when they join the body in question.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

Reporting and disclosure

- Political parties should standardise the way that they report on both funding and spending, at the national and constituency level, as recommended by the CSPL.⁸
- A clear definition of what constitutes a legitimate donor. At present, donations can only be made by organisations that are “trading in the UK”. However, there is no real definition of what this means. This should be resolved.
- Disclosure to the Electoral Commission of all loans, credit facilities and security arrangements provided to a political party.
- Disclosure to the Electoral Commission of those documents under which loans, credit facilities, or security arrangements provided to a political party are made.

Investigating abuses

- The Electoral Commission should take a more proactive role in investigating financial irregularities.⁹
- The provisions of the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000 should be strengthened in relation to the duties of auditors and the Electoral Commission and in relation to civil and criminal offences.

3.2 LOBBYING

In a liberal democracy, a wide range of interest groups such as companies and industry associations, NGOs and local pressure groups need to be informed about the process of changing or making public policy. Equally, they need to be able to express their views about what shape policy should take and they should also be able to influence policy by convincing MPs or the government about the merits of particular points of view or amendments during the passage of legislation.

Interest groups will always seek to influence outcomes in a democratic system, but of course this should be done through lawful and ethically defensible means. However, there is also a risk that politics will be influenced in improper ways, and that those who are able to buy greater levels of access, or store up favours through the provision of hospitality or implied offers of future employment, will have a disproportionate and distorting influence.

The fact that lobbying does not always live up to ideal standards has been illustrated many times in recent years:

- In March 2012, the Sunday Times revealed that the Conservative Party’s co-Treasurer had been filmed offering the newspaper’s undercover reporters posing as representatives of a foreign hedge fund, access to the policy committee at No 10 Downing Street in exchange for a £250,000 donation.¹⁰
- In January 2009, a Sunday newspaper published allegations that four peers had told its undercover reporters that they were willing to use their influence to help to

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8. Ibid.

9. As recommended by GRECO in its Third Round evaluation report on Transparency of Party Funding (2008). Available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/greco/evaluations/round3/GrecoEval3%282007%293_UnitedKingdom_Two_EN.pdf

10. Heidi Blake & Jonathan Calvert, ‘Tory Treasurer charges £250,000 to meet PM’, *The Sunday Times*, 25th March 2012.

amend legislation, for money. One of them bragged that he had already changed legislation for a company to which he was a paid consultant.¹¹

- In early 2010, a Channel Four Dispatches programme revealed secretly recorded discussions in which six MPs, who thought they were attending an interview for a job with a communications company, had offered to use information or contacts gained in their political roles in order to lobby on behalf of corporate clients. One former cabinet minister described himself as being like “a cab for hire”.¹²
- In July 2011, it was revealed that Prime Minister David Cameron had met key executives of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation 26 times during his first 15 months in office. In December 2011, the Cabinet Office admitted that this had included one private meeting with Murdoch at a time when he was bidding to take 100 per cent control of Sky television.¹³
- In October 2011, Defence Secretary Liam Fox resigned after the press reported that he had allowed a lobbyist friend of his, Adam Werritty, to gain access to the Ministry of Defence without clearance and to accompany him on 18 foreign trips. Werritty had reportedly been present at many meetings where Fox had met military figures, defence contractors and diplomats, and had presented himself as an adviser, despite having no official role.¹⁴

These examples suggest that UK politicians fail to see the risks of close relationships with lobbyists, and in particular business lobbyists, and are not able to maintain the safeguards that are essential to ensuring integrity. Politicians appear far too willing to accept corporate and media hospitality, refusing to acknowledge that, even if they are not engaged in anything untoward, such behaviour fails to meet the ‘appearance standard’ and thus erodes public trust.

Relations with the media industry have recently been a source of particular concern. The reliance of governments, political parties and individual politicians on the media to promote their messages in a manner that is attractive to the electorate appears to have a deleterious effect on politicians and their commitment to act in the public interest. In some cases, it appears to have distorted government policy, possibly in key areas such as press regulation and regulation of media ownership.

There are also concerns about the role of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, which are semi-official entities around particular subjects or groups. Businesses and interest groups donate large amounts to these groups and there is a danger that some may be using donations to provide hospitality to MPs and thereby buy influence.

The coalition government has taken some steps in the right direction. It has changed the ministerial code to require ministers to declare all meetings with lobbyists and it has banned lobbying by former ministers for two years after they leave office.

11. Claire Newell, Jonathan Calvert, & Michael Gillard, ‘Revealed: Labour Lords change laws for cash’, *The Sunday Times*, 25th January 2009.

12. The episode of *Dispatches* was called ‘Politicians for Hire’ and was broadcast on Channel Four, 22nd March 2010. For more details and clips of the programme see:
<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/episode-guide/series-57/episode-1>

13. ‘Prime Minister’s meetings with proprietors, editors and senior media executives’, The Prime Minister’s Office, 15th July 2011.
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/media-engagements-may-2010-present.pdf>

14. Nick Hopkins & Simon Bowers, ‘Not Just Dubai: Liam Fox met Adam Werritty 18 times around the world’, *The Guardian*, 10th October 2011.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/oct/10/liam-fox-met-adam-werritty-around-world>

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The Government proposes to regulate lobbying through introducing a statutory register of lobbyists and ensuring greater transparency. It has initiated a public consultation on its proposals. TI-UK recommends that legislation should be enacted in the 2012/13 session of Parliament to implement a statutory register of lobbying activity. This statutory register should have the following features:

- It should cover all organisations and self-employed persons that engage in substantial lobbying activity targeted at public officials. This means that organisations that are not specialist lobbyists but have in-house lobbying capacity and engage in substantial lobbying activity would also have to register.
- It should require organisations/individuals to disclose:
 - their expenditure on lobbying;
 - the subject on which public officials are being lobbied;
 - the names of the public officials and public institutions that are being lobbied; and
 - information on any public office held previously by any employees (during the past five years).
- It should be maintained and monitored by an independent public body.
- It should provide for criminal and civil penalties for non-compliance with the law/rules.

If a statutory register of lobbying activity with the above features were to be implemented, it would go a long way towards promoting transparency in ways that would inhibit corrupt behavior. However, a statutory register will not be sufficient to curb abuses of entrusted power for private gain that may take place through the revolving door between government and business. Other reforms to tackle those abuses are needed and these are discussed in TI-UK's separate policy paper on the revolving door.¹⁵

3.3 PARLIAMENTARY EXPENSES AND ALLOWANCES

TI-UK believes that the new Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has the potential to curb abuses of the parliamentary expenses system on the scale revealed in 2009-10. We make some recommendations for ensuring that the new system stays on track.

MPs have busy lives in which they work long hours and travel frequently between Westminster and their home constituencies, sometimes several hundred miles away. They need to be able to re-claim legitimate associated expenses so that they can fulfill their parliamentary role without being personally out of pocket or under financial stress. However, in 2009, it was revealed that many MPs had been systematically abusing the system for re-claiming expenses for their private gain.

Common practices included manipulating which of their homes was designated as the 'second home' and hence eligible for expenses, claiming for items seen as excessive or as clearly personal (such as Christmas decorations and pet food) rather than related to parliamentary duties. In addition, a few individuals appeared to have used allowances for rent or mortgage payments to enrich friends, family, or themselves. The fact that Parliament blocked successive attempts by the media to access expenses claims under the Freedom of Information Act added to the sense that MPs were flagrantly abusing the system.

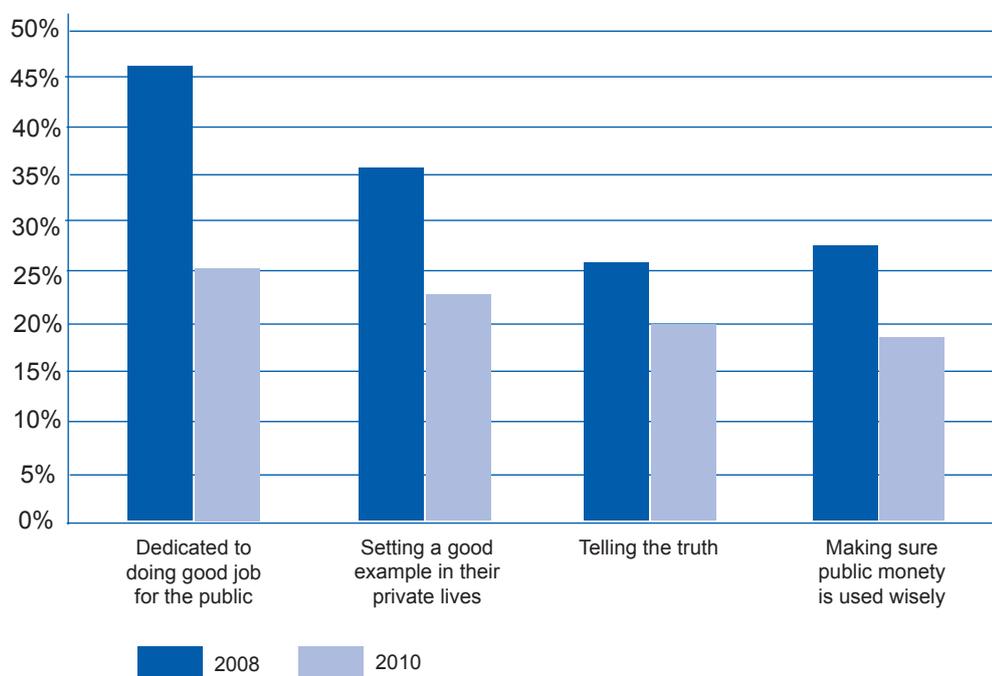
15. <http://www.transparency.org.uk/our-work/publications/200-policy-paper-series-2---fixing-the-revolving-door-between-government-&-business>

Of equal concern was the fact that some MPs both at the time, and to the present day, did not seem to acknowledge the seriousness of the scandal or the implications for the reputation of Parliament.

The ensuing scandal led to the resignation of six ministers and prompted more than a dozen MPs to announce that they would not stand for re-election. Many other MPs were de-selected or banned by their parties, and to date four MPs and two peers have faced criminal charges for false accounting (of whom five have been found guilty while one still awaits trial).

The scandal was also highly damaging to public trust in politicians and political institutions. It is striking to see how public confidence in parliament fell between 2008 and 2010.¹⁶

The impact of the UK expenses scandal



MPs who have been critical of IPSA apparently fail to recognise that, given the damage caused by the expenses scandal, the establishment of an institution which is truly independent is necessary to restore confidence

In response to the scandal, a new body external to parliament was created to set rules for expenses and to process all claims. The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) has experienced some teething problems and has been criticised as being unnecessarily costly.¹⁷ However, the MPs who have been critical of IPSA apparently fail to recognise that, given the damage caused by the expenses scandal, the establishment of an institution which is truly independent, transparent and capable of robust enforcement of the new rules is necessary to restore confidence.

16. Source: *Survey of Public Attitudes*, Committee on Standards in Public Life, September 2011, available at: [http://www public-standards.gov.uk/Library/PRESS_NOTICE_ANNUAL_REPORT_AND_RESEARCH_150911.pdf](http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/Library/PRESS_NOTICE_ANNUAL_REPORT_AND_RESEARCH_150911.pdf)

17. See, for example, the Public Accounts Committee report on IPSA, available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news/ipsa-report/>.

Appointments that are paid through public funds should be publicly advertised in the normal manner and there should be a fair and transparent procedure for appointments

The rampant abuse of the expenses system appears to have been successfully curbed by IPSA. At the same time, it must be recognized that the new system was put in place hastily and without considering some of the fundamental and more controversial questions, such as whether MPs should be paid higher salaries. Some MPs argued, wrongly, that the abuses of the expenses system reflected an ‘unspoken understanding’ that the expenses system could be used to top up salaries. However, this factor is an important part of the picture and it needs to be addressed. TI-UK recommends that:

- The government should conduct a public consultation on the salaries of MPs, with a view to determining whether there is a need for a new pay structure which might, for example, reward participation in committees.
- Political party leaders should exercise leadership by encouraging MPs to accept IPSA and recognise that a new independent regulator is necessary given public outrage at former abuses. MPs should be publicly encouraged to work constructively with IPSA and give it time to improve its systems.
- The employment of family members in MPs’ offices gives rise to the perception of cronyism. Appointments that are paid through public funds should be publicly advertised in the normal manner and there should be a fair and transparent procedure for appointments.
- There should be a periodic review of the expenses regime to reassure the public that it is functioning fairly and in the public interest.

3.4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST¹⁸

Declarations of interest are an established mechanism by which conflicts of interest can be recognised and avoided. TI-UK believes the following principles should underpin codes of conduct for UK Parliamentarians:

- There should be an over-arching rule that any Parliamentarian should declare any interest or asset, financial or non-financial, that might reasonably be thought by others to influence, or be capable of influencing, his or her actions or words.
- Transparency is an important feature of accountability and preventing corruption. Where there is doubt as to whether transparency is appropriate, the tendency should be to err on the side of increasing transparency.
- Non-financial interests and relationships, and indirect interests, can be as important as direct financial interests in influencing behaviour. Likewise, some business relationships in which the financial value is negligible, such as frequent low-level hospitality with an influential business person in a constituency, can be highly important. Therefore, financial value alone should not be the test of a rule’s relevance and minimum thresholds should take into account these other factors.
- There is a question as to whether registers of interests should be extended to third parties, including children, siblings and close associates. The presumption should be that such categories of person are included within the rules, just as such a presumption is made when dealing with ‘politically-exposed persons’ overseas in, for example, anti-money laundering regulations.
- Overseas assets, income and activity are equally relevant and should be included in the revisions of the appropriate rules.

18. See also TI-UK’s submission in April 2012 to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards Consultation Paper: Review of the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct
<http://www.transparency.org.uk/our-work/publications/116-ti-uk-submission-on-parliamentary-code-of-conduct>

The UK honours system has long been criticised for encouraging inappropriate patronage

3.5 GRANTING OF HONOURS

The UK's honours system should operate as a way of recognising outstanding contributions by individuals to service in the public and private sectors. Unfortunately, it is vulnerable to abuse and has long been criticised for encouraging inappropriate patronage. In order to reduce the scope for corruption:

- If a cap is not placed on donations to political parties, a political party should be prohibited from nominating a person for honours where that person has provided financial or other support of more than a total value of £10,000 in any one year, to that party or to a person or organisation associated with that party. Similarly, a person who has been nominated for honours by a political party should be prohibited from providing financial or other support to that party in excess of a total value of £10,000 in any one year.
- The members of the House of Lords Appointments Commission should be entirely independent of any political party.
- The House of Lords Appointments Commission should vet the suitability of party political, as well as non-party political, nominees.
- There should be public disclosure of all nominations and reasons for nominations.
- Penalties under the Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act should be increased so that they are equivalent to those under other bribery legislation.

3.6 OVERSIGHT AND ENFORCEMENT

The issue of who should exercise ethical oversight over parliamentarians is controversial, as placing unelected officials in a position of influence over elected representatives itself runs the risk of undermining democracy.

There are currently several oversight bodies that include a mixture of elected and appointed members, including:

- The Committee on Standards in Public Life¹⁹
- Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA)²⁰
- Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards²¹
- The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOPA)²²
- The Committee on Standards and Privileges²³
- House of Lords Commissioner for Standards²⁴
- The Committee for Privileges and Conduct²⁵

19. <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/>

20. <http://parliamentarystandards.org.uk/Pages/default.aspx>

21. <http://www.parliament.uk/pcs>

22. <http://acoba.independent.gov.uk/>

23. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-archive/standards-and-privileges/>

24. <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/the-commissioner-for-standards/>

25. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/privileges-committee-for-privileges/>

- The Lords' Conduct Sub-Committee²⁶
- Independent Adviser on Ministers Interests²⁷
- The Electoral Commission.²⁸

At times, such bodies have been criticised for being ineffective, or having a remit that is not fit for purpose. For example, the notionally 'independent' Adviser on Ministers' Interests only investigates cases on the initiation of the Prime Minister.²⁹

The large number of scandals of recent years suggests that the current system of ethical oversight is not working and is in need of a comprehensive review. However, it is not clear how such a review is best conducted. TI-UK believes that, although it is one of the current oversight bodies, the Committee on Standards in Public Life is probably best placed to undertake such a review.

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26. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/sub-committee-on-lords-conduct/>

27. <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/prime-ministers-independent-adviser-ministers-interests>

28. <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

29. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/10/andrew-rawnsley-sir-alex-allan-resign>

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Individuals or political parties that turn a blind eye to the abuses in the UK political system are endangering democratic values and the rule of law.

Most politicians in the UK would believe themselves to be acting in the public interest and operating within a relatively uncorrupt system. However, there is a glaring mismatch between this self-perception and public perception. There have been enough scandals in UK politics over the past decade to warrant real action rather than rhetorical promises to introduce reforms. Complacency and denial are no longer an option.

Reinforcing the UK political system's defences against corruption requires unambiguous and transparent rules, underpinned by a sensible and fair logic, and it also requires individuals who act with integrity and do not try to cheat the system. Politicians need to be able to distinguish between proper and improper forms of influence and appropriate forms of income-generation. Above all, they need to accept there is a problem.

In each of the areas highlighted above, there are recommendations as to how the situation could be improved. Overall, the alarming recurrence of scandals and allegations points to a larger problem of ethics and oversight. TI-UK therefore recommends:

- **Independent oversight:** all matters relating to parliamentary ethics should be brought together into a single, coordinated, unified body that has the unambiguous support of all political parties and genuine powers of censure and sanction.
- **Political parties:** parties should do a better job of policing their own members – whether in either house of parliament or senior officials of the party. Those found to have breached the Nolan Principles should be expelled from the party.



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