

CSPL review on MPs' outside interests

SUBMISSION FROM TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL UK

Introduction

In this submission, Transparency International UK (TI-UK) provides a response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) short review on MPs' outside interests. Unfortunately, as a relatively small charity, we do not currently have the resources to respond in detail to your consultation. However, we do have some specific points regarding the following:

Avoiding actual or perceived conflicts of interest

The current rules regarding the outside employment of MPs are inadequate and give rise to the perception, and quite possibly the reality, of conflicts of interest. In our paper *Accountable Influence*, we highlight how during one year alone 73 MPs – over 10 per cent of the Commons – had some form of external advisory role between 2014 and 2015.¹ The cumulative take home pay from this work was around £3.4 million, equivalent to an average of £46,000 per MP. Whilst it is unclear whether these advisory roles related to Parliamentary affairs, there is obviously a significant risk that they could have been. This risk is recognised in the rules of conduct for the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, which provide wording which we think could be a model for the House of Commons (see Annex below).

To help avoid any potential conflicts of interest, MPs should be prohibited from undertaking any paid advisory work relating to the affairs of Parliament.

Ensuring transparency about MPs' outside interests

Having accessible, intelligible, analysable and meaningful data on MPs' outside interests is essential to detecting and deterring conflicts of interests. However, at the moment this information is published in formats that do not allow the easy analysis of MPs' outside interests, and does not appear to provide information that matches the reporting requirements under the Code of Conduct for MPs.

The Commissioner and the Parliament's digital service should work together to ensure the Register of Members' Financial Interests is published online as machine-readable open data as soon as possible. This is already available for the House of Lords and should be a priority for the Commons. We understand work is still under way on this project however this needs to be made a priority to avoid further delay. We have previously recommended to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards that this should be in place by the end of the first quarter of 2017. However, at the time of writing we understand this has not happened.

We are happy to provide advice and assistance to those working on this project to help ensure that any data that is published meets users' needs.

¹ Transparency International, *Accountable Influence: Bringing lobbying out of the shadows* (September 2015)
<http://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/accountable-influence-bringing-lobbying-out-of-the-shadows/>

Annex: rules on external advisory employment for members of the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales

Section 5: lobbying and access to MSPs

“Members:...should not accept any paid work to provide services as a Parliamentary strategist, adviser or consultant, for example, advising on Parliamentary affairs or on how to influence the Parliament and its members. (This does not prohibit a member from being remunerated for activity, which may arise because of, or relate to, membership of the Parliament, such as journalism or broadcasting, involving political comment or involvement in representative or presentational work, such as participation in delegations, conferences or other events.)”²

Guidance on lobbying and access to Assembly Members

“Members:...should not accept any paid work to provide services as a parliamentary strategist, adviser or consultant, for example advising on National Assembly for Wales affairs or on how to influence the National Assembly for Wales and its Members. (This does not prevent a Member from being remunerated for activity which may arise because of, or in relation to, membership of the Assembly, such as journalism or broadcasting, involving political comment or involvement in representative or presentational work, such as participation in delegations, conferences or other events”³

² Scottish Parliament, *Code of Conduct for Members of the Scottish Parliament: 6th Edition, Revision 1* (June 2016) <http://www.parliament.scot/Parliamentaryprocedureandguidance/CCEdo6Revo1201605.pdf>

³ National Assembly for Wales, *Code of Conduct for Assembly Members and Associated Documents* (May 2016) p.103 http://www.assembly.wales/en/memhome/code-conduct-mem/Documents/Standards%20Compendium_draft_October%202015_v2-FINAL.pdf

About Transparency International UK

Transparency International (TI) is the world's leading non-governmental anti-corruption organisation. With more than 100 chapters worldwide, TI has extensive global expertise and understanding of corruption.

Transparency International UK (TI-UK) is the UK chapter of TI. We raise awareness about corruption; advocate legal and regulatory reform at national and international levels; design practical tools for institutions, individuals and companies wishing to combat corruption; and act as a leading centre of anti-corruption expertise in the UK.

We work in the UK and overseas, challenging corruption within politics, public institutions, and the private sector, and campaign to prevent the UK acting as a safe haven for corrupt capital. On behalf of the global Transparency International movement, we work to reduce corruption in the high risk areas of Defence & Security and Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare.

We are independent, non-political, and base our advocacy on robust research.

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