

Committee on Standards inquiry into the rules for and regulation of All-Party Parliamentary Groups – submission from LGB Alliance

Introduction

This note provides information from LGB Alliance in response to the call for evidence in relation to the inquiry into the rules for and regulation of All-Party Parliamentary Groups being carried out by the Committee on Standards.

LGB Alliance is a group that represents the interests of a rapidly growing number of lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people. We represent thousands of LGB people who have grave concerns about the loss of our rights, specifically in relation to moves to replace, in law and elsewhere, the category of 'sex' with 'gender identity', 'gender expression' or 'sex characteristics'. In the world of LGBT rights this is not just a question of language as it erases homosexuality. We are long-time gay and lesbian activists who fought for the rights of people with a same-sex sexual orientation which we now see eroded.

Our principal interest in relation to APPGs has been in the APPG for Global LGBT Rights. This note highlights a number of concerns that we have regarding the operation of that APPG. The issues are described with reference to each of the relevant themes of the Committee's inquiry. We hope that you will be able to take this evidence into account in your considerations and would be more than happy to provide further clarification as required.

Summary

The secretariat of the APPG on Global LGBT+ Rights is provided by an employee of The Kaleidoscope Trust (a not-for-profit organisation that campaigns for the human rights of LGBT+ people globally) with declared funding from the Baring Foundation.

Our concerns regarding this arrangement relate to transparency and inconsistencies in declared funding, the appropriateness of the extensive lobbying activities of the APPG including the role of the secretariat, and the way in which the APPG gives the impression of having an official role in law making.

Detailed comments and evidence

1. Transparency and appropriateness of funding of APPG activities and secretarial support

The secretariat of the APPG on Global LGBT+ Rights is provided by an employee of The Kaleidoscope Trust. Our concerns regarding this arrangement relate to inconsistencies in the declared funding and potential issues of appropriateness around the funding. Specifically, the full value of the benefit in kind of the secretariat services provided by The Kaleidoscope Trust are not properly reflected in the APPG's register declaration. This is borne out by the following evidence:

- The financial value of the provision of the secretariat from The Kaleidoscope Trust is stated in the Register of APPGs as being between £19,500 and £21,000 for the year Jan 2020 – Jan 2021. The description of the entry states that this is paid for by a grant from the Baring Foundation.

REGISTER OF ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS

Benefits In Kind				
Source	Description	Value £s In bands of £1,500	Received	Registered
Kaleidoscope Trust	Kaleidoscope Trust is funded by the Baring Foundation to act as the group's secretariat From : 15/01/2020 To : 14/01/2021	19,501-21,000	15/01/2020	14/04/2020

£40,000
2018 / 2 years

Kaleidoscope Trust

International Development

To support the coordination of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Global LGBT Rights.

https://baringfoundation.org.uk/our-grant-making/funded-projects/?keywords=Kaleidoscope+trust&filter_year=0&filter_programme%5B%5D=28

- According to the AGM minutes of 9 January 2019, the administrator was employed from 4 February 2019, funded by a grant from the Baring Foundation for £40,000 over two years.

APPG 2019 activity items:


1. New administrator: The APPG was updated by Paul Dillane (*Kaleidoscope Trust*) about the selection and employment conditions of the incoming administrator, Anna Robinson, who starts on 4 February 2019. The position is funded by a grant from the Baring Foundation for £40,000 over two years, and when advertised received over 40 applications. Nick Herbert will undertake to update the Baring Foundation at a meeting later in January. It was agreed that as Chair, Nick Herbert was to be her immediate line manager to set work directives, with Kaleidoscope Trust as responsible for legal employment issues. It was also agreed that Anna would work for the APPG as a whole, being available to all Officers and Members, and would operate a network of key staff contacts in each Officer's office to coordinate APPG campaigns.

<https://www.appglgbt.org/minutes>

- The recruitment advert for the position of *Researcher and Coordinator – APPG on Global LGBT Rights* describes the position as “This full time role will provide dedicated support the APPG” and the salary is listed as £30,000 to £35,000. The advert describes a range of responsibilities of the role, fully dedicated to the APPG and extending well beyond provision of secretariat functions.

Researcher and Coordinator - APPG on Global LGBT Rights

Kaleidoscope Trust

 City of London, London, Greater London

 £30,000 - £35,000

 Full-time

This full-time role will provide dedicated support to the APPG. You will manage administrative processes to ensure that members can collaborate effectively, co-ordinate communication with stakeholders and support the development and delivery of projects including organising events, undertaking research, developing policy, delivering oral and written briefings and the delivery of consultations, inquiries and other programmes of work.

<https://www.charityjob.co.uk/jobs/kaleidoscope-trust/researcher-and-coordinator-appg-on-global-lgbt-rights/607284>

Based on the above information, there appears to be a significant discrepancy between the value of the Secretariat support provided by the Kaleidoscope Trust employee and that which is declared. The value of the benefit in kind is declared to be between £19.5 and £21.5K for one year, yet the role attracts a salary of £30-£35K per annum. With associated employment costs, the cost to The Kaleidoscope Trust of providing a full-time employee as secretariat for the APPG is likely to be closer to £40K p.a. or around double the amount declared in the Register.

This is also double the value of the Baring Foundation grant which is said to fund the post (£40K over two years). It is unclear where the additional funding for this post comes from, but as the post is administered by The Kaleidoscope Trust it is probable that they are bearing the cost from other income. Apparent willingness to contribute their own resources suggests strongly that there are advantages to The Kaleidoscope Trust in providing the secretariat role to the APPG.

This example demonstrates that despite the obligation for APPGs to enter details of their Benefits in Kind in the Register of Interests it is currently possible for the full value and source of these benefits not to be fully declared. This is clearly not acceptable if APPGs are to operate without the perception of anything other than full disclosure.

As a general point regarding the funding of APPGs, it might be worth also considering whether it is acceptable for APPGs to receive Secretariat and other benefits from Third Sector organisations that are in receipt of Government funding. Should public money be channelled through lobby groups and used to fund the activities of APPG?

2. The role of external secretariats to APPGs

The Kaleidoscope Trust employee providing the secretariat for the APPG on Global LGBT+ Rights is doing far more than simply acting as secretariat. The title

of the role is “APPG Researcher and Co-ordinator” and based on minutes of the AGM in 2019 and 2020 it is clear that the activities of the individual extend to advocacy, planning and communications tasks well beyond the scope of a secretariat.

- Minutes of the AGM in 2019 where the new administrator is introduced demonstrates the range of activities that fall within the responsibility of the researcher, e.g. coordinate extensive APPG campaigns for the year: Equal Rights Coalition related lobbying (the co-chair of which is provided by The Kaleidoscope Trust on behalf of the UK), Religion enquiry, GRA reform, etc. <https://www.appglgbt.org/minutes>
- The administrator was tasked with drawing up a roadmap for a new project which, again, appears to be more akin to advocacy and beyond the scope of a secretariat

· Religion enquiry: to use the APPG’s new administrative capacity to press ahead by conducting and publishing a thorough review into the interaction between global LGBT Rights and faith, by holding evidence sessions with religious leaders from across the spectrum. It was agreed that once in post, Anna would draw up an outline and roadmap for the project, into which Officers would then feed suggestions. It was generally agreed that the focus should be informed by asking LGBT people of different faith groups for their experiences and priorities.

Secretariat functions can be considered to comprise arranging meetings, booking rooms and issuing agendas and minutes, as well as extending into meeting facilitation. However, the role here extends explicitly into research and lobbying, including advocacy planning, communications and PR which are tasks well beyond the scope of a secretariat.

The impression that is given is that the group is being run effectively as a fully functioning lobby organisation. Should a secretariat be running campaigns and lobbying? The extensive work programme has many parallels with activities of Select Committees, e.g. organising calls for evidence, conducting inquiries, issuing press statements, etc.

3. The risk of APPGs being used for access by lobbyists, other organisations or by foreign governments, and how any conflicts of interests arising can be managed

The provision of the secretariat role by The Kaleidoscope Trust gives extensive access to and influence with parliamentarians. Not least as the role of the employee extends beyond that of purely procedural and transactional tasks necessary to ensure smooth running of the APPG. It is unclear from any publicly available information how The Kaleidoscope Trust was selected for this role.

The nature of the relationship between the APPG and The Kaleidoscope Trust is important due to the particular stance on certain aspects of LGBT rights and associated lobbying aims of that organisation. These are not shared by all civil society groups and members of the LGBT community. From the perspective of the LGB Alliance, there are grave concerns about the potential for the lobbying direction to erode rights of LGB people, yet there is no transparency regarding the selection and The Kaleidoscope Trust as provider of secretariat and advocacy services.

Having a clear statement setting out the process by which any externally provided secretariat support was selected would promote transparency and build trust with the public.

4. Status of APPGs in the House and confusion with Select Committees

The language and content of statements issued by the APPG are very similar to those issued by other parliamentary committees. It is not clear that in the eyes of the public the APPG would be perceived as being of different status. Recent statements by the Chair of the APPG reveals that he clearly holds a perception of the APPG having an elevated status and influence with the Government.

- Crispin Blunt, Chair of the APPG issued a statement on 22 Sept in response to the Government's announcement on GRA reform expressing disappointment that the Government approach did not reflect the "considerable work done in privately agreeing a way forward". The APPG had produced an extensive report which it had shared with the Minister and the Government Equalities Office privately in July.

<https://www.appglgbt.org/news/appg-lgbt-statement-in-response-to-the-governments-response-to-the-gra-consultation>

I regret that the considerable work done in privately agreeing a way forward by the wider LGBT+ lobby both in Parliament and outside, to deliver respect and reassurance around the position of trans people in the UK meeting square on the anxieties of some cisgender women around single-sex spaces for example, and the quality of relationship and sex education in schools, was not adopted by the Government, and does not appear to have been properly understood. ~~It is certainly seems to me that the Minister for Women and~~

*Equalities Office have also had their advice disregarded. I am now releasing the **private paper that was agreed by the Officers of the APPG on 8th July 2020**. The paper was shared with all the political parties' own LGBT+ Groups and was discussed fully with the relevant civil society groups. Whilst different organisations had their own order of policy priorities for trans people, it was agreed that the APPG position paper, in light of the government's apparent position, would represent a satisfactory outcome to the consultation. **The paper was offered privately to the government** in the wake of the anxieties set off by the Secretary of State when she appeared before the Women and Equalities Select Committee on 22nd April 2020.*

- Crispin Blunt also called for the Minister for Women and Equalities to be replaced (statement 24 Sept.)

<https://www.appglgbt.org/news/senior-tory-mp-calls-for-a-new-equalities-minister-after-debate-on-gender-recognition-act>

Crispin Blunt MP, Chair of UK Parliament's All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global LGBT+ Rights, has called for new leadership in the Government Equalities Office following a debate on reform of the Gender Recognition Act. The debate followed an [announcement](#)

- The language used in a current “call for evidence” supporting an inquiry being conducted by the APPG is not significantly different to the type of language used by Select Committees. There is no attempt made to clarify the status of this inquiry relative to those carried out by Select Committees, thereby blurs the distinction between them.

<https://www.appglgbt.org/current-inquiry>

This inquiry will explore existing alliances between communities of faith, religious institutions, government bodies, international institutions, human rights defenders, and LGBT+ advocates as well as opportunities to strengthen and promote the same in the future. It will identify the main challenges and conflicts, and put forward practical recommendations and best practises to the UK Government on these issues regarding the false dichotomy of freedom of religion or belief and LGBT+ equality.

We will seek both oral and written evidence from a range of stakeholders with expertise and experience in this subject.

Of potentially most fundamental importance is the attitude to transparency and advocacy betrayed by the APPG Chair's recent statements.

Firstly, the information that the APPG had collated a significant report which it had shared privately with the Government (only released publicly in September) reveals a significant operation in place that is not open to wider scrutiny. Not only does the APPG risk being perceived by the general public as a select committee, it is also not subject to the same levels of scrutiny as official government committees.

Secondly, the existence of a "privately agreed way forward" with the Government (even if, in the event, one-sided), gives the impression of the APPG expecting to directly and covertly influencing policy decisions. This reaction betrays the existence of attitudes detrimental to openness and transparency in the workings of this particular APPG.

Furthermore, the overall impression that is given through the various statements, calls and general communications issued by the APPG is that this group has not made sufficient efforts to make the distinction between their status and that of a select committee clear. We would suggest that most people not familiar with APPGs would take the group to have similar status to select committees rather than a group that is not subject to the same level of scrutiny and accountability.