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# Regulation of All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs)

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal, bicameral, cross-party groups on topics of mutual interest. They are not official parliamentary bodies. Although they are bicameral, members of the House of Lords cannot be the chair of an APPG and the House of Commons has always taken the lead in the regulation and registration of APPGs.

## 1

### Current rules

The [current rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#)<sup>1</sup> were [agreed by the House of Commons on 13 May 2014](#).<sup>2</sup>

When these rules were agreed, the House also agreed that the Committee on Standards would have the power to update the Guide to the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups and to make minor changes to the rules.

The [Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#) (PDF) was published in March 2015 and slightly revised in May 2017. The rules agreed by the House were included as an appendix to this report.<sup>3</sup>

The current rules were agreed following a review by a working group established by the Speakers of both Houses. Its report, [Report to the Speaker](#)

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, [Guide to the rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#)

<sup>2</sup> [HC Deb 13 May 2013 cc709-719](#)

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons, [Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#) (PDF), March 2015 and slightly revised in May 2017

[and Lord Speaker](#) (PDF), was published in June 2012.<sup>4</sup> It considered the implications of the growing number of APPGs for Parliament; their funding and accountability; and whether there was risk of confusing them with select committees.

Following this review, the new Committee on Standards considered what should be done to implement the Working Group's recommendations. The Committee's November 2013 report, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#) (PDF) had to two aims:

- To update the rules to improve transparency and propriety
- To improve understanding of APPGs.<sup>5</sup>

The working group's report and the subsequent review and proposals from the Committee on Standards are outlined in the Library research briefing [All-Party Parliamentary Groups: 2014 rule changes](#).

## 2 Improving the governance and regulation of APPGs

### 2.1 2020-2021 review by the Committee on Standards

In October 2020, the Committee on Standards launched a wide-ranging inquiry into APPGs.<sup>6</sup> The review highlighted fresh concerns about the governance and regulation of APPGs.

In 2013, the Committee had noted concerns that APPGS could be mis-used by lobbyists but felt better transparency was a sufficient safeguard. But by 2020, the Committee said the “primary risk” of APPGs was “of improper access and influence by paid lobbyists and commercial entities or by hostile state actors”. Both the Speaker and the Director of Security for Parliament expressed these concerns to the Committee in evidence for its review.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Speakers' Working Group on All-Party Groups, [Report to the Speaker and Lord Speaker](#) (PDF), 11 June 2012

<sup>5</sup> Committee on Standards, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#) (PDF), 29 November 2013, HC 357 2013-14

<sup>6</sup> Committee on Standards news, [Committee launches new inquiry into All Party Parliamentary Groups](#), 12 October 2020

<sup>7</sup> Committee on Standards, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation](#) (PDF), 29 April 2022, HC 717 2021-22, para 24

In April 2022, the Committee on Standards [published the outcome of its review](#) (PDF) and set out a series of possible reforms to address four “current risks posed by APPGs”:

- Reduce the number of APPGs, as the large number of groups made it more likely that a group may be subject to improper access or influence, and made it more difficult to monitor compliance
- Further enhance transparency relating to “eventual funding” and the provision of external secretariats
- Limit who was permitted to provide secretariats
- Increase regulatory enforcement.<sup>8</sup>

The Committee on Standards said that the possible measures it suggested could not all be implemented, some were mutually exclusive. However, it invited comments on its suggestions, describing them as “a set of options for consultation”.<sup>9</sup>

Following the publication of this report, the Committee on Standards [received further written evidence](#) in response to its calls for comments.<sup>10</sup> It also received [a response, by correspondence, from the Government](#) (PDF).<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2

### Committee of Standards final recommendations

In April 2023, the Committee published its [final proposals](#) (PDF).<sup>12</sup> It reported that a number of respondents to its recommendations expressed concern that they would be disproportionate if applied to all groups.

It therefore proposed a “two-tier approach”:

APPGs which do not receive external financial benefits would continue to have relatively light-touch requirements; but APPGs which receive external financial benefits or benefits in kind over a set threshold would have additional

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<sup>8</sup> As above, paras 55-56

<sup>9</sup> As above, para 62

<sup>10</sup> Committee on Standards, [Inquiry: All-Party Parliamentary Groups consultation](#)

<sup>11</sup> Committee on Standards, [Letter from the Leader of the House dated 5 September 2022, containing the Government response to its report on All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation](#) (PDF), 22 September 2022

<sup>12</sup> Committee on Standards, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups: final proposals](#) (PDF), 5 April 2023, HC 228 2022-23

requirements to enhance transparency and ensure that such Groups, and their finances, are subject to appropriate governance and oversight.<sup>13</sup>

It set out proposed changes that would apply to all APPGs and an additional set of changes that would apply to APPGs that received registrable financial benefits. These “additional rules” would apply to Groups that received outside financial benefits totalling over £1,500 in a calendar year.<sup>14</sup>

It annexed the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups incorporating its proposed changes to its report.

## 2.3 Government response

The [Government’s response](#) (PDF) to the Committee final proposals was published by the Committee on 6 July 2023.<sup>15</sup>

The Government agreed with the proposed two-tier approach to regulation. However, it thought further consideration should be given to extending the ban on foreign provision of secretariat support or funding is to all foreign organisations.

On 6 July 2023, the Leader of the House announced that the Committee on Standards’ report on APPGs would be debated on Wednesday 19 July 2023.<sup>16</sup>

## 3 Number of APPGs

In his annual report for 2022-23, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards reported the number of APPGs in each of the last five years. He gave details of the total number of groups, how many were subject groups and how many were country groups; and how many had received benefits (such as money, goods or services) in excess of the financial threshold that required their registration.<sup>17</sup> The information provided by the Commissioner is set out in the Table below.

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<sup>13</sup> As above, para 13

<sup>14</sup> As above, paras 15-17

<sup>15</sup> Committee on Standards, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups: final proposals: Government Response to the Committee’s Eighth Report](#) (PDF), 6 July 2023, HC 1706 2022-23

<sup>16</sup> [HC Deb 6 July 2023 c954](#)

<sup>17</sup> Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, [Annual Report 2022-23](#) (PDF), 12 July 2023, HC 1519 2022-23, p32

At present, “specific benefits or cumulative benefits from a single source above the value of £1,500 must be registered”.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 1: Number of All-Party Parliamentary Groups (2018-19 to 2022-23)**

	Total	Subject Groups	Country Groups	Groups registering benefits
2018-19	697	559	138	365
2019-20	355	275	80	164
2020-21	717	585	132	360
2021-22	762	626	136	389
2022-23	758	621	137	399

Source: Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, [Annual Report 2022-23](#) (PDF), 12 July 2023, HC 1519 2022-23, p32

Note: A country group is one which focuses on a particular country, area or region outside the UK; a subject group focuses on a particular topic or issue<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> House of Commons, [Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#) (PDF), March 2015 and slightly revised in May 2017, Appendix 4

<sup>19</sup> House of Commons, [Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#) (PDF), March 2015 and slightly revised in May 2017, Appendix 1

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