

Committee on Standards

Oral evidence: [All-Party Parliamentary Groups, HC 672](#)

Tuesday 11 January 2022

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Chris Bryant (Chair); Mrs Tammy Banks (Lay Member); Mrs Jane Burgess (Lay Member); Andy Carter; Alberto Costa; Mrs Rita Dexter (Lay Member); Allan Dorans; Yvonne Fovargue; Sir Bernard Jenkin; Dr Michael Maguire (Lay Member); Mr Paul Thorogood (Lay Member).

Questions 106-174

Witnesses

I: Natascha Engel, Chief Executive, Policy Connect, Marisa Heath, Secretariat, APPG on Animal Welfare, Danny Stone MBE, Chief Executive, Antisemitism Policy Trust, and Suzie Tucker, Head of Strategy and Communications, National Museum Directors' Council.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Antisemitism Policy Trust](#)
- [National Museum Directors' Council](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Natascha Engel, Marisa Heath, Danny Stone and Suzie Tucker.

Q106 **Chair:** Welcome to the Standards Committee inquiry on all-party parliamentary groups. We are grateful to the four witnesses before us. May I suggest that you briefly introduce yourselves, starting with Suzie?

Suzie Tucker: Hi, I'm Suzie Tucker. I'm the head of strategy and communications at the National Museum Directors' Council. We represent the leaders of national collections and major regional museums around the UK. We have 46 members. We are funded by our members, all of which are funded directly or indirectly by Government, but we are an independent, non-government organisation. We have a small staff team, and our main focus is on advocating for our members and representing them to the Government and other stakeholders. As part of that, we have been running the APPG for museums since it was formed in September 2020.

Chair: Thank you. Natascha?

Natascha Engel: I am Natascha Engel, and I am, since yesterday, the new chief executive of Policy Connect. We run nine separate APPGs that are very different in nature, but before I was CEO of Policy Connect, I was a Labour MP until 2017, and I was a Chair of a Select Committee and a Deputy Speaker for a while.

Chair: Welcome, and congratulations on your new job. Danny.

Danny Stone: I am Danny Stone. I'm the chief executive of the Antisemitism Policy Trust, a charity that works to educate decision makers about antisemitism. For more than, I think, 20 years, we have provided the secretariat to the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism. On a personal, voluntary basis, I do some work with the all-party parliamentary group on wrestling.

Chair: Which is a bit different. Thank you. Marisa.

Marisa Heath: Good morning, everyone. I am Marisa Heath, and I run the APPG for animal welfare. I am very much involved in animal welfare, animal health, and conservation across the board. I have been running the APPG on a part-time basis since about 2008; I balance that with my work with numerous other groups outside Parliament that advise the Government. I have been in different roles, bringing in NGOs and industry, in different groups that basically campaign and work on animal welfare and health.

Q107 **Chair:** Great. Thank you very much. I will kick off with a couple of questions; other members of the Committee will pitch in if needs be. Incidentally, you do not have to repeat something said by another person on the panel if you just agree with it. First, why do APPGs need



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secretariats provided from outside at all? Suzie, do you want to start?

Suzie Tucker: We on the museums APPG would say that having the secretariat run by the NMDC gives the group expertise and insight from the sector. We are a sector body that represents practitioners, and provide the group with that direct link. We can advise on topics of interest and what the issues are for museums. We see it as a valuable way of providing a route for information and communication between our sector and parliamentarians across all parties and both Houses. From our point of view, it has been really valuable as a way of ensuring better understanding of museums. They deliver across a broad range of policy areas, so the APPG is a good vehicle for that. We think that we add real value—not only the material benefit of doing the job of running the group, but by providing that sector insight.

Q108 **Chair:** How much do you think that costs a year, roughly?

Suzie Tucker: We offer it in bits of staff time. For us, it is probably under £10,000 a year in monetary value of staff time and a few events, although, obviously, in the last couple of years we have not really been able to do those as much as we would like.

Q109 **Chair:** Most of your organisations would be charities.

Suzie Tucker: Most of our members are charities; some of them are also NDPBs.

Chair: Sorry—you're not allowed any acronyms.

Suzie Tucker: Sorry, non-departmental public bodies—the national museums, which are also charities. Yes, the vast majority of our members are charities or public bodies of some kind.

Q110 **Chair:** Thanks. Natascha?

Natascha Engel: I forgot to say this at the beginning: I do not think this is relevant, but I am a trustee of the Antisemitism Policy Trust. I do not think there is any sort of conflict, but I just thought it was a weird coincidence that I ought to mention. On top of what has been said about outside expertise, which is really important, the cross-party working nature of all-party groups is important; it is more important than ever to put party political point-scoring aside and look at an issue across parties.

On having outside support for those groups, I think everybody agrees that Select Committees are the best thing that Parliament does. There is a lot of administrative support behind the scenes, including the Clerks and the expertise that is brought in. You just do not have that with APPGs, and if MPs were forced to provide all that administrative support themselves through their offices, that is pretty much all they would do. On top of that outside expertise and cross-party working, I think that administrative support—facilitating what MPs and peers do, so that they can concentrate on the policy and the matter at hand—is really useful.

Q111 **Chair:** You provide the secretariat to quite a few APPGs. How do you fund



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each of those?

Natascha Engel: They are funded by different members. We have a membership system where members pay to become members of APPGs, and that is all fully declared, in the same way that everybody else does.

Q112 **Chair:** Sorry, say that sentence again. You pay Members to become members of APPGs?

Natascha Engel: No, members pay to be members of APPGs. We provide the secretariat, but the membership is external, so we provide that sort of buffer.

Q113 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** You do not mean Members of Parliament; you mean external people.

Natascha Engel: Not Members of Parliament, sorry. Outside organisations are members of APPGs, and we facilitate that.

Q114 **Chair:** They pay you?

Natascha Engel: They pay membership, yes, which is all fully declared on the—

Q115 **Chair:** To be a member of the APPG?

Natascha Engel: To be members of Policy Connect, and then we provide those support services for the APPGs.

Q116 **Chair:** Sorry, I may be being very stupid here—I may be missing something—but the only people who can formally be members of an APPG are Members of the House of Commons or Members of the House of Lords.

Natascha Engel: Sorry, I think I have mis-said that. They pay membership to Policy Connect, and then we provide the support services for the different APPGs.

Suzie Tucker: “They” being outside bodies.

Q117 **Chair:** Yes, I understand that, but is there a direct connection between the money they are paying to you and their involvement, or their engagement, with the APPG?

Natascha Engel: No. What we do is provide those support services for all those nine APPGs that we support. Right at the beginning with a declaration of interests, exactly as was said previously, we declare what we provide in staff support, and also in administrative support. That all comes from the membership fees that are paid to Policy Connect.

Q118 **Chair:** The total pot, rather than each individual—

Natascha Engel: Absolutely, and then we declare all of that on our website in funding bands, so that every single penny that is paid to Policy Connect is then declared on the website. Everything is also declared with the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists.



Q119 **Chair:** Thanks. Danny?

Danny Stone: To my mind, it saves time and public money. To take an example, if a member of the public writes to the chair of the all-party group on antisemitism, asking, "What is this IHRA definition? I want to know about it," the Member would have to work out whether they knew, then go to others, trying to work out who could provide that information. The APT, which is the secretariat, knows what that is. We can help provide information, and we can support the chair in responding to those inquiries. That just gives you a sense of what we might be able to do.

If a researcher in an MP's office had to address not the inquiries that come in, but some of the public discourse, that might be very difficult for them, especially when we are talking about antisemitism. We have developed a thick skin. It is important to say this: why do we—particularly the APPG against antisemitism—need to keep to the rules? Because it is the right thing to do, and it is professionally appropriate and morally right, but it also undermines the conspiratorial antisemitism that is out there. We have to keep to the rules because the conspiracy is that there is some kind of agenda here. An academic a few weeks back was saying, "It is not just MPs and Lords; who funds the organisation? Zionists. People don't have any idea of the penetration in civil society of pro-Israel forces." This is about the APPG specifically. APT is not a Zionist organisation. We provide a benefit in kind. I am that benefit in kind, so I am the extent of the Zionist penetration in Parliament, depressing as that may be for some.

Chair: This is the hidden hand argument.

Danny Stone: Yes, this is the hidden hand. It may sound over the top, but that speaks to why we have to be so transparent, ensure that all the rules are kept, and go over and above the rules. There are drawbacks for Members who join the APPG against antisemitism, because they will be attacked in that way. It is important to set that context. We are able to talk about these matters, and to provide support—both knowledge on antisemitism and the ability to stomach and respond to some of it.

Chair: Marisa, and then we will come to Bernard.

Marisa Heath: A good APPG should be ears on the ground; it should be listening to what is happening outside Westminster, picking up on trends, and starting the process that moves into policy. Someone who sits in the middle, who is able to engage with all the outside bodies, should be those ears on the ground, and should be able to pick up on all the things that are happening. It is really useful to have that person who is informed and engaged with the sector that the APPG is representing, so that they are able to say to the politicians—the members of the group—"This is what is going on out there; this is what we might need to look at."

Let me give a good example. In 2010, we were looking at puppy breeding, puppy farms, licensing and all those issues. That was 10 years before they came into Parliament; I think it was in 2018 that we were talking about Lucy's law, and stopping imports of puppies and cropped ears—all things



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that are on the legislative table, but we spotted them a long time ago. We have been doing a lot of work in the APPG and the Government body, DEFRA, to make these things happen. That is because I as the secretariat was able to say, "This is what is happening outside; you need to start thinking about this." We did a report in 2010, and have moved that work forward. Having that person sitting in the middle, with their ear to the ground, is really crucial.

Q120 Sir Bernard Jenkin: I have absolutely no doubt that APPGs provide a fantastic opportunity for Members to learn about subjects and to campaign on subjects they believe in, and that APPGs are made more effective by having outside support. I would like each of you to address two questions. At what point does the cash, the funds, or the benefits in kind being used to support an APPG become cash for access? Secondly, what additional measures could be put in place that would prevent any possible perception that that was the case?

While you are thinking about your answers, I put on record that I was chairman of an APPG when the rules for the declaration of outside interests came into force, and I was rather embarrassed that the people supporting that APPG wouldn't let on who the donors were who were supporting that APPG, so I had to apologise for that and resign from the APPG. It underlines how, inadvertently, Members can get into a situation where they are compromised, when actually the APPG was just supporting me and what I was doing, and what I believed in. How would you address those two questions?

Suzie Tucker: The main way to address them, I would say, is transparency. I can only speak to how we manage our APPG. Certainly, it is very clear on the APPG's website that we provide the secretariat. It is very clear on our website how we are funded and who our members are. All of NMDC's members are public bodies anyway, so lots of them have very good relationships with their local MPs. On cash for access, I would not say that it is anything nefarious; it is all very open and public. We publish meeting dates and very thorough minutes of our meetings on our website. For us, that is quite important, because we want lots of people, including those in our sector, to see what the group is discussing. I think "transparency" would be my main response to that.

Natascha Engel: I would say exactly the same: the more transparency there is, the better. Our funders—I will call them funders rather than members—are all listed. We list who they are, and the band in which they pay—how much money they contribute. That is for providing a forum in which people can bring forward ideas and share, exactly as we said, all the outside, real-life experiences that are really important in informing policy making.

To avoid any idea of cash for access, we are absolutely clear on who is funding, how much is being paid and what the outcomes are: reports, administration, room booking, agendas, minutes—all the stuff that happens in Select Committees and APPGs. It is really important that it is clear what is being funded. On top of that, we have a code of governance



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that we ask all our funders to sign, which is absolutely explicit that the agenda is set by the members of the APPG.

Q121 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Members of Parliament, you mean.

Natascha Engel: Yes, by Members of Parliament. They have editorial control over any report that is produced. We have had in the past people who have wanted access, and we have absolutely refused that. The best outside service providers for APPGs perform a really important function in providing that safety buffer to ensure that none of that really egregious practice happens.

Q122 **Chair:** For the record, remind us what Policy Connect is.

Natascha Engel: Policy Connect is a think-tank. We specialise in bringing political party members together with experts from outside, academics, charities and campaign groups. For example, on the carbon monoxide APPG, we bring together victim groups and landlords to make sure that we can identify the barriers to stopping landlords having carbon monoxide poisoning in—

Q123 **Chair:** What is your company structure?

Natascha Engel: It is a social enterprise—not for profit.

Q124 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** May I ask a supplementary? You have not been clear so far. The funders give money to Policy Connect. Presumably each funder is interested in one particular group. Is there transparency about which all-party group they are supporting, so it is clear on your register, if not the register in the House of Commons as well, that those particular companies or interests are supporting that particular group?

Natascha Engel: It is definitely on those registers. A lot of them are interested in more than one group. We have a very wide variety of—

Q125 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Why is that not cash for access? Presumably your funders are more involved with an all-party group through you than they would be if they were not giving that money.

Natascha Engel: If they were not giving that money, we would not be able to pay for salaries for policy experts.

Q126 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Exactly. You are reinforcing the point; the money that they pay gets them access to an all-party group. How do we avoid the perception that that is what is happening?

Natascha Engel: We invite all sorts of different people, as all-party groups do. Anybody who is interested can come along. There are public galleries in all-party groups. That is not access; that is—

Q127 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** So even if they were not funders, they would be able to attend the all-party group.

Natascha Engel: Absolutely. Of course people can attend all-party groups; there are public galleries for all-party groups. There are also roundtables and forums and all sorts of different things that are not all-



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party groups. I think it is really important that as many people as possible can attend those all-party groups. There is no direct access to individual Members or Ministers or anything like that, and I think that is where the real problem is.

Q128 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** So it would be up to the Members of Parliament to make sure that they were not favouring the funders but genuinely running the all-party group, on a funded or non-funded basis, for everybody interested.

Natascha Engel: Yes, absolutely. All we do is facilitate the forum. It is like saying that if you invite people to a Select Committee inquiry, that is giving them access to it. They are providing that forum for those ideas to be shared.

Q129 **Mrs Banks:** Natascha, you said a couple of things that I want to clarify. You said that there is not cash for access, but then you mentioned briefly that it depends on how much people pay. Do you have membership tiers—

Natascha Engel: Absolutely not.

Mrs Banks: —or is it all one level?

Natascha Engel: It is actually according to how much people can pay. Some organisations are very large and some are very small. It is absolutely not tiered, and it does not give people more access or less access. This is in order to participate in forums and share ideas; it is no more than that.

Q130 **Mrs Banks:** So the amount they pay is dependent on the size of the organisation or the amount they can afford. Or is it a standard—

Natascha Engel: No, it is what they want to pay. There are lots of different tiers. Some people pay £175 a year; others pay a lot more than that. It just depends on what they want to pay, what they are able to pay, and how much engagement they want to have, but there is absolutely no idea of tiered access at all.

Q131 **Mrs Banks:** To clarify, you said some pay £175 a year and some pay much more. If they pay much more, are they much more involved, or is it a standard—

Natascha Engel: They can be. It depends on how much engagement they want to have with an APPG and the policy making. For example, the manufacturing APPG, which has been going for a very long time, does lots of different inquiries into different issues. Some members will be more interested in engaging with the ideas of those issues than others. It just depends.

Q132 **Mrs Banks:** Could the members who paid £175 engage and have as much impact as the members who chose to pay significantly more?

Natascha Engel: Absolutely, and they do so.



Mrs Banks: Thank you.

Q133 **Chair:** Danny?

Danny Stone: As far as I see it, antisemitism is a national issue. I have briefed people in this room, and I would be doing that anyway. The work that we do exists irrespective of whether there is an APPG, so it is not cash for access. The access, in as much as MPs want to hear about antisemitism, is there from those who are willing to provide it; there is no cash in that. The benefit in kind that the APT provides allows us to bring those MPs together so that we can detoxify some of the potential partisan activity around antisemitism.

The all-party group on antisemitism has established a framework whereby the leadership take on issues within their own parties. That is what is so great about the all-party group. John Mann, now Lord Mann, set that precedent—that he would take this on in his own party—as a then Labour MP. Andrew Percy wrote not long ago about concerns he had about the use of the phrase “cultural Marxism”, and he has referred people for training. Catherine McKinnell has sought to speak out about antisemitism in the Labour party, Lisa Cameron in the SNP and Liz Saville Roberts in Plaid. It provides that forum so that it is the best of Parliament, where people are able to engage and work in a cross-party way.

In terms of the measures that prevent any conflict of interest, we have a memorandum of understanding between the all-party group and the Antisemitism Policy Trust. That is on our website. It is very clear about the fact that we do not dictate the agenda for the group—the members do that—but it also includes relevant details on GDPR and staffing. For example, it sets out that I am responsible to the trustees of our charity, although I must obviously be responsible when the co-chairs of the all-party group call me in on something as the secretariat. It is very clear. We also, at board level, have a conflict-of-interest policy of our own at the APT, and we have been talking about strengthening that. And—this was a recommendation I had for the Committee—I went through all the all-party group rules, noted where or how I thought we were keeping them and sent that to the registrar. The registrar came back and said, “Actually, that’s not a service that we provide—to check or audit you,” and I wondered whether that might be something that they could do. I appreciate there’s a lot of all-party groups, and I don’t want to give anybody any more work, but it felt like a transparent and appropriate thing to be doing to say, “Here are your rules. This is how we are keeping them. Can you just tell us that we are doing okay, or is there something that we should be doing better?”

Q134 **Chair:** You will have noticed that the number of APPGs has gone up from four hundred and something to six hundred and something—we have almost as many APPGs as Members of Parliament now. I don’t want to enter into a discussion about the nature of antisemitism, because we could be here for a very long time and I think you know my views anyway, but have people attempted to set up competitor APPGs in your field, as it were?



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Danny Stone: No. There are other relevant APPGs. There is one on British Jews, for example. I suppose, theoretically, people could do that; there is nothing in the rules, as I understand it, stopping it happening. But not to the best of my knowledge, no.

Chair: Marisa?

Marisa Heath: We do have that problem—the subject of the question you have asked. Sometimes—

Chair: Marisa, you are going to have to speak up. It's very difficult to hear you.

Marisa Heath: I'll speak much more loudly. We do have that problem, in that we try to be an animal welfare APPG that is practical and reasonable, but sometimes those from the animal rights perspective come in and say, "We want to have a position where we have a ban on eating meat," or something, and our APPG may not agree and then they say, "Well, we'll go and set up our own APPG. It's not difficult. We can do it. We just need a Member of Parliament and we'll have a conflicting one." We have faced that problem a few times.

Going back to the questions on funding, I won't repeat the point on transparency, because it has been covered well and is obviously key. I would say the way we run ours is through fairness of access. Until 2015, we were funded solely by the RSPCA, and we made a decision at that point that it was not the fairest way of doing things, so we set up a board of what we call advisers, who sit with our political officers. That is the British Veterinary Association and other big groups like that, which we believe represent the animal welfare sector. They all pay a contribution as well, and it goes into a set bank account, which is the APPG bank account. That pays for me and the running of the group, and we report back financially to all of that board and the officers every time we meet. We have board meetings about four or five times a year—not so frequently during covid. What we have tried to do is get away from having a sole funder and have more than one funder. While the RSPCA is still the greatest funder of the group—quite significantly still the greatest—we have made it a broader playing field, where all those members have a role in setting our agenda for the year and our work plan.

What we have also done is make sure that I am answerable to the officers. I will go to the board and say, "This is what I think the work plan should be. This is where we should be going." They give me their advice, but at the end of the day, it is the officers who make all the decisions. They tell me what they want me to do; I don't answer to—

Q135 **Chair:** You mean the officers of the APPG rather than the board?

Marisa Heath: Yes, the officers—the political elected. It has to be the elected chair and vice-chairs, basically. Those are the ones who have the authority over me to say you should or shouldn't be doing this, but they will listen to the board to get their guidance from the expertise of what



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they are doing around animal welfare issues. We changed the way we run our APPG to make it a bit broader, in terms of that access.

Q136 **Andy Carter:** I should say that I chair a number of APPGs, although I don't think I am involved in any of the ones that any of you are responsible for. Marisa, can I pick up on your point? You said, right at the end, that you changed the way you operate. Do you think that the current rules make it clear that it is the responsibility of an APPG chair, a Member of Parliament, to set out the agenda for APPGs, or do you think that there is some confusion around that?

Marisa Heath: I don't think it is completely clear. We decided to do that because we felt it was best practice, but it is not completely clear, and I know a number of APPGs don't operate in that way.

Q137 **Andy Carter:** You talk about best practice; I think it is actually the rules that that is how it should occur.

Can I put the same point to the other witnesses? I am particularly concerned about APPGs that have sole funders. I wonder whether you have any of those organisations. Natascha, I will come to you first because you have the broadest number of organisations. Do you have any situations where you are the secretariat for an APPG and it is solely funded by one organisation?

Natascha Engel: No.

Q138 **Andy Carter:** Is that something that you have deliberately done—that you have not gone down that route?

Natascha Engel: We find that having a large number of funders means that we avoid that problem—definitely. We have a huge diversity of different types of funders, different sizes of organisations, different types of organisations and different amounts that they fund. We have avoided the issue that way, so I do not think it is really something that applies to Policy Connect.

Suzie Tucker: The NMDC is the sole funder of the APPG, because we provide the secretariat. We are funded by our members. As I mentioned earlier, that is all quite transparent on our website.

Q139 **Andy Carter:** For me, as a Member of Parliament, the purpose of APPGs is to help inform me of issues in that sector. Are you clear with parliamentary members of the APPG that you are giving the view of your supporter, or do you look to bring in other speakers outside that financial supporter?

Suzie Tucker: Yes, we do work with other bodies. We are conscious that the NMDC represents one part of the museum sector. We represent lots of the biggest museums—the national museums and the big regional ones—but we are quite explicit that the APPG is for all museums. Although we provide the secretariat and we do not represent every museum in the country—there are about 2,500 museums—we work very closely with



other sector bodies and we are very explicit about doing that. It is about the entire sector, not just the bit that we represent.

Andy Carter: Danny?

Danny Stone: People could go on the APT website and see that we work regularly with the Community Security Trust, the Union of Jewish Students, the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council. We do not profess to have all the answers or want to be the only voice in the room. It is not about that for us—it is more about ensuring there is the wide knowledge.

On the wrestling front, everyone who represents a constituency here will have a wrestling promotion in their constituency, and each of those promotions wants a seat round the table in terms of telling MPs about the problems in the industry, of which there are a number. As a volunteer, I work to get those voices together for the MPs as much as possible.

Q140 **Andy Carter:** What could we put in place to make sure that all-party groups are genuinely led by MPs and not by external organisations? That is my understanding of how it should be.

Danny Stone: At the moment, there is not really a strong feedback loop. MPs do not have to report on what their all-party groups have been doing, for example. Loth as I am to suggest that MPs have more work to do, that might not be a bad idea. If there were an annual report back on what our group has been doing, at least it would focus minds.

Natascha Engel: To go back to your question on clarity about responsibility, it depends on the experience of the chairs of the all-party groups. You have some people who come in who are brand-new and who are not themselves that clear. An organisation like Policy Connect, which has been around for over 25 years, has quite a good institutional memory. For us, it is really important that the reputation of the APPG enhances the reputation of Parliament. Therefore, it is absolutely in our interests to make sure that it is really clear at the APPG that it is the chairs and the elected officers who decide everything, from the agenda to everything else.

Q141 **Andy Carter:** How would you manage a situation where a chair wanted opinions voiced at the APPG that were contrary to your financial supporters' opinions? For example, on a contentious issue, there may well be a very different view from a number of organisations that the chair wanted to bring in. Would you be happy to put that to your financial supporters?

Natascha Engel: Absolutely. It isn't about bringing it to the financial supporters. That is the role of the APPG. If that is what they want to produce in the report, that is what they produce. That is neither here nor there for the funders—absolutely not.

Suzie Tucker: I feel that that is part of the deal with an APPG. We support the chair, but it is the chair and the members of the group who set the agenda. In the scenario you described, which I am pleased to say



has not arisen for us, we would offer one of our members to speak, to give the view from our sector.

Q142 Michael Maguire: I have a quick question for Natascha. Forgive me if I have got this wrong, but I want to develop something that Bernard asked earlier. I have just had a quick look at your website, and I can see a list of funders, but I cannot see who funds what. If we take an example—and I am picking these out at random—Manchester Metropolitan University funds in excess of £60,000. It does not tell me where that £60,000 goes, which APPG it is related to.

Secondly, coming back to the point made earlier by Tammy, are you saying that AbilityNet, which funded less than £5,000, gets the same service as someone who funds £60,000? If so, is that not cash for access?

Natascha Engel: They definitely do get exactly the same service. What might need to be clearer is that we have memberships—so funders pay for memberships—but also there are different projects that we do, but those are independent of APPGs, strictly speaking. We put that all together. We declare every single piece of income that we get in those funding bands, but not every single penny allocated to which APPG it goes to. The issue is that we generally provide secretariats for APPGs: we do not have one funder funding an APPG directly. That is in order to avoid exactly what we are talking about here—that there is one dominant funder per APPG. We avoid that by—

Q143 Michael Maguire: From a transparency point of view, I do not know who funds your APPGs. If Manchester University is giving £60,000 or £70,000, I do not know where that money goes. I am not asking for an answer, but you need to tell me if it is yes or no.

Natascha Engel: You are absolutely right. It goes into a main pot from which we provide the support for APPGs. What we do is declare the administrative and staffing costs, like everybody else does, when we set up those APPGs, and those declarations are made from Policy Connect, but it is also partly in order to break the link between one single funder and one APPG. It is really a safety net.

Q144 Michael Maguire: Did I misunderstand your answer to Sir Bernard's question, that you can disclose a direct link between the funder and the APPG? You cannot do that?

Natascha Engel: No, you can't. What you do have is all the funding that we receive and all the work that we do, and all the APPGs that we provide services for, are all there. That is all declared.

Q145 Chair: I thought it was interesting when you said "When we set up an APPG". Maybe I am being a bit puritanical, which is not my wont, but I want APPGs to have sprung independently into the mind of an MP or a peer, who decides that this is an issue that needs to be addressed and then goes about trying to find some means of resourcing that.



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Natascha Engel: I hope I did not say that we set up APPGs: we service APPGs, we do not set them up.

Chair: You said, “We set them up”.

Natascha Engel: I am sorry if I did.

Q146 **Chair:** I am sure all of you will be aware of the 200 new ones that we have had in the last year, sometimes cutting up into little bits—so manufacturing is cut up into 20 different parts, and so is cancer. It sometimes feels as if what has happened is—not in your set of circumstances—that a public affairs consultancy has gone, “Aha, I know a good way of pushing the agenda of such and such a trade body, and I bet you they’d pay for it too. This is the way to do it.” Is that a danger?

Natascha Engel: Not as long as it is absolutely transparent where the funding is coming from. Certainly in our case, it would be MPs and peers sitting down together and wanting to set up an all-party group and then finding a secretariat, if that is what they want to do. Generally, they bring in people who have an expertise in a certain area, hence you have animal welfare and museums. As long as it is absolutely transparent who funds the organisation that is providing those APPG services, I think that can be a good thing.

Q147 **Michael Maguire:** But it is not transparent as to who funds the APPGs.

Natascha Engel: No, but it is transparent who funds Policy Connect and who provides the secretariat.

Chair: Rita, Alberto and then Paul. Rita first.

Q148 **Mrs Dexter:** Suzie, I want to ask you a question that might also be relevant to Marisa, but I am not sure. Is the LGA as involved as your organisation with assisting the APPGs? Drawing on what you said about the fact that you do not represent all museums, presumably local authorities must be a significant owner, as it were, of museums, and must have a significant interest in the work of the APPG. Or that is what I would like to imagine as a long-ago local government officer. I was wondering how it works. The same might be true in the context of your work. You are a serving councillor, so you might have a particular perspective on that. That is a very specific question about how you work with other bodies with an interest if you are providing the secretariat services.

On my second question—I am a lay member of the Committee and not an MP—APPGs feel like a curious animal to me. My colleague, Alberto, has explained to me in the past that the one thing they are valuable for is providing opportunities for cross-party working. Natascha, you referred to that earlier. That seems a good thing in principle. I do not think it is very visible externally.

Many things are curious about this system. It feels like some MPs are members of 50 or 60 APPGs, and that feels like an oddness. Do you think there ought to be any limits on the number of APPGs that Members can



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be a member of? Or should there be a limit on the number of members of an APPG? In your experience, are all members of APPGs that you are involved in valuable? Do they earn their place?

Chair: And can you name the ones who aren't? [*Laughter.*]

Mrs Dexter: The other thing I am interested in is effectiveness. In my past career I was involved in the fire service. The recent death of David Amess has reminded everyone of the work that he did in relation to chairing the fire safety and rescue APPG. We know that he wrote dozens and dozens of letters to the Government saying, "We are telling you this and this will end in disaster." It got to the point where they did not even get a reply to their letters to the Government, so I am interested in the question of effectiveness. I can see from your point of view, providing secretariat services, why APPGs would feel very valuable in one sense. They justify your existence, don't they?

But if I look at it from the other end of the telescope, is it valuable? I would value your view on that.

Suzie Tucker: First, lots of our members are local authority-run museums, so they are part of the local authority themselves. We speak to the LGA a lot as a sector body. We have a lot of conversations with other sector bodies. I don't think they have attended a meeting, but we had a specific meeting, for example, on civic museums and the role that they play—the majority of those are local authority funded—and we worked with other sector bodies and with our members. The Local Government Association knew about that session, so we have informal links. Local authorities are absolutely the biggest funders of museums in the UK, so they are a huge stakeholder.

In terms of opportunities for cross-party work, I don't feel I can comment on whether we should limit the number of groups that an MP is a member of. We are delighted that we have got about 75 members in our group. It was really important to us that it was cross-party. We were careful to make sure that our vice-chairs and officers are cross-party and that both Houses are represented. I would say that, probably in common with most groups, there is a real mixture in terms of engagement and activity of members. It is a little bit hard for me to say. We have only been running our group since about six months before the pandemic, so we have been able to have very few in-person events, and that has obviously had a big knock-on effect. It might be different in normal times.

Q149 **Chair:** Can I check on your events? They are by invitation, aren't they? All APPG events are by invitation; they are not public events.

Suzie Tucker: Yes.

Q150 **Chair:** One of the dangers about that is that it does potentially look like access.

Suzie Tucker: Yes, and that is something that has obviously been slightly affected by the fact that we have had to do things remotely, so there is a very different set-up in terms of the number of people.



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Q151 **Andy Carter:** Can I ask about that? Let's say you were doing a Zoom event about British museums for the APPG. Would you promote it on your website? If a member of the public emailed and said they would like to view that, would you allow them to do so?

Suzie Tucker: We haven't promoted them to members of the public. We put in on the APPG website, but I think it is probably fair to say there is not a huge public audience for that.

Q152 **Andy Carter:** If it was an event in a room like this and a member of the public wanted to come in and watch it, would you allow them to do so?

Suzie Tucker: I cannot comment on that, because we have not had the opportunity to do that. We have not been able to have any events in person, so I do not actually know. Perhaps colleagues might be able to advise. We have only run virtual meetings, and those are by invitation only. We do invite representatives from our sector, because we think that is useful for both sides. There is an all-party notice, so that any members of the group can attend.

Chair: Shall we go back to answering Rita's questions?

Suzie Tucker: I think the last part of the question was about effectiveness. Again, our group is quite young, and it is always very difficult to say in advocacy and public affairs work which influence was the strongest. But in terms of things such as letters to Government, I know the chair of our group is keen to use the group to further the interests of museums. One example might be the museums and galleries exhibition tax relief, which has been a real benefit to the sector, to promote new exhibitions and the creation of new displays. It had a sunset clause on it that was due to run out next year, so that was a very concrete policy area that we could brief our APPG on, and the chair could write a letter on behalf of the group, saying that was something that he would really like to see changed. I am pleased to say that did happen, although I could not confirm if that was just down to—

Chair: I should say I'm a member of the group. For all I know, I might be an officer.

Q153 **Mrs Dexter:** Did you say the LGA was a member of your organisation?

Suzie Tucker: No. Our members are only museums, but lots of our member museums are local authority-run services.

Chair: The others can answer. Let's start with Danny.

Danny Stone: I think you said that the APPG justifies our existence. Did I get that wrong?

Mrs Dexter: I did say that, actually.

Danny Stone: That is not accurate, because the APT exists, as I said, without the APPG. We work with the APPG because of the benefit of cross-party working on antisemitism, but we would be—



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Mrs Dexter: It justifies your existence as a secretariat.

Danny Stone: Well, I suppose. Yes, that is different.

In terms of visibility, it is shame that you have not seen the cross-party working, because on wrestling, for the first time ever, you saw Mark Fletcher and Alex Davies-Jones. They had articles in the newspaper and were on the radio talking about the issues with wrestling, which is an unregulated industry in the UK, and they were doing that on a cross-party basis. We have pictures on our website, which sometimes get into the press, of MPs working together on antisemitism and seeking to address it together and jointly. As I say, we have co-chairs at the moment, who are Catherine McKinnell and Andrew Percy. They do joint op-eds and what have you.

In terms of effectiveness, an APPG is only ever as effective as the chair can make it. It is about the Member driving the issue or agenda or giving their time to it, in my view. That is why the APPGs on antisemitism and on wrestling are so effective. Mark Fletcher, Alex Davies-Jones, Catherine McKinnell and Andrew Percy put a lot of time and effort into it, because they care about this stuff. In terms of what that then does, in wrestling there has been a “Me Too” movement speaking out. There have been welfare issues, health and safety issues and the gender pay gap. For the first time ever, we have seen the Health and Safety Executive take an interest. We have seen Government Departments take an interest in trying to provide some kind of structure in that space, which is excellent. On antisemitism—

Chair: Sorry, Danny, but we are running short on time. Natascha, do you have something to add to what the other two have said? Then we will go to Marisa.

Natascha Engel: Very briefly, not every MP is either a Minister or shadow Minister or sits on a Select Committee. MPs want to pursue important policy issues, such as fire safety, contaminated blood and carbon monoxide poisoning, on behalf of their constituents. APPGs are a brilliant way of doing that.

I definitely would not limit the number of APPGs that an MP can sit on—that is up to them. It is a separate question about how valuable the product is and what comes out of it. If there are ways of reporting what an APPG does, then great, but I would not limit the numbers.

Chair: Lovely. Marisa?

Marisa Heath: Very quickly, I would not limit the numbers, but I would do something around the officers. There are a couple of APPGs where the officers have been pressurised to become an officer. In other words—“We can’t run this group without you doing this; please, please, please—” Then the officer never engages at all and the meetings are run by perhaps one MP, if that, for the whole year and there is no proper engagement.



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Officers should become officers on account that they are going to engage and do things, such as get involved with the inquiries, attend the meetings, sign off the end-of-year financial reports and that kind of thing. They should be hands-on as officers.

Q154 Alberto Costa: Good afternoon and thank you very much for coming before this Committee. I greatly value the work that each of you do within your organisations to help the democratic process of our country. I think APPGs are an invaluable way for legislators to further their interests and knowledge in areas, and ensure policy is drafted that assists our country's needs. Without individuals like you, unfortunately some APPGs are very unsuccessful.

I should declare that I am co-chairman, with Tonia Antoniazzi, of the APPG on medicinal cannabis. We are trying our best to push the Government to allow the NHS to prescribe medicinal cannabis free to seriously ill children for their epilepsy. I could not do that work without a secretariat on board.

I am also chairman of the APPG on microplastics, and we have a fantastic secretariat in the Women's Institute, without which we would not be able to draft reports, bring stakeholders together and discuss issues about trying to tackle the scourge of microplastic pollution. I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill trying to get washing-machine filters for all microfibres, following a campaign that the Women's Institute first alerted me to five years ago. So, APPGs have an important role in the life our country.

The question I have for each of you is how can we ensure that we maintain valuable all-party groups that are able to promote the good activity that they do? There is the point about how to promote and should we be promoting more. That costs money. A website costs money and having people working to bring stakeholders together costs money, even if that is in kind, as Danny was talking about in the role that he plays.

How can we do that but, at the same time, ensure that for the purposes of our Committee we have absolute transparency? Even if people are financing all-party groups, that does not mean there is something fishy about that. How can we ensure funding is done in such a way that it minimises the risk of the cash-for-access problem, which I think Bernard alluded to? Can I start with you, Danny?

Danny Stone: I was thinking back through some of the things that we have already discussed. Transparency is key, as well as accessibility of that transparent information. Possibly, we should look again at the way the APPGs are shown on the website; some of the information that appears on the Parliament website might be improved. Certainly, we should ensure that those transparency declarations are there and can be found very easily.

As I said, we have a memorandum of understanding with the APPG on our website. Maybe all APPGs should have that and maybe that should be requirement for the websites of those external organisations? As for MPs reporting back, as I said we have a conflict-of-interest policy. Maybe that should be required when a charity provides the secretariat. If you take



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that package of measures together, then I would hope you end up with something that would be seen by the public as a decent, transparent way of organising it.

Finally, on the resource in Parliament, I don't know that there is much there.

Alberto Costa: There is none in Parliament, as you know.

Danny Stone: We might think about how it could be better resourced.

Q155 **Alberto Costa:** Should some parliamentary resources be given to all-party groups?

Danny Stone: It would not be a bad thing, in my view.

Alberto Costa: Thank you. Natascha?

Natascha Engel: Just remember that parliamentary resources are taxpayers' money. That has to be taken into account. We have 600-odd APPGs, so that is definitely a consideration. Transparency and accessibility of information are really important. We also have a code of governance between us and funders, and that kind of thing may be something that we need to look at.

It might be that those organisations that provide APPG support services ought to get together and, between ourselves, find a better forum for sharing best practice, so that we are promoting the good work of servicing APPGs, instead of it being constantly a defensive thing about the work that we provide. Rather than looking at meeting the rules, it is about going above and beyond: how do you really reinforce the credibility of APPGs and the secretariats, and how do you make sure that the work that we do really enhances the reputation of APPGs in Parliament? I think that would be down to us.

Alberto Costa: Thank you, Natascha. Suzie?

Suzie Tucker: I agree with everything that has been said; there is not much to add, really. We have terms of reference between us and our chair, but again, it is not required. As already mentioned—

Q156 **Chair:** Do you think it should be required?

Suzie Tucker: At the moment, , from our point of view of running the group, it is fairly light touch in terms of reporting. It feels like there could be space for slightly more scrutiny and reporting without that having a huge knock-on effect in terms of the ability to run an APPG.

Q157 **Alberto Costa:** Thank you. Marisa, just before you answer that question, I might in fact want to work with you as chair of the APPG on microplastics, because we are looking into the impact on the marine environment. Does your animal welfare APPG deal with marine animals as well?



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Marisa Heath: Yes, we are very broad. We deal with whatever MPs ask us to deal with, basically, so you can do exactly that.

Q158 **Alberto Costa:** Do you have anything else to add on the question I asked about transparency?

Marisa Heath: Only to say that, as I mentioned earlier, it may not be right for the others, but we have a separate bank account that shows very clearly the money that goes into our APPG, and our records then show everything. If I buy a piece of paper, that is recorded and it comes out of that bank account, so all the officers need to do is look at that bank account to see what money has come in and where it is going. It does not go into a separate entity where it is another body or another organisation outside of Parliament, and we have a couple of officers as signatories on that account, so that helps.

I will just make the final point that we mentioned spot checks in our submission. We do not expect 600 APPGs to be checked up on, but they could do random checks to see that people are following the rules. That goes back to the point—I will give my opinion here—that there are too many APPGs, and I think that makes it very difficult.

Q159 **Alberto Costa:** Okay. Chair, if I could, Danny Stone made a point earlier on about asking the registrar for guidance on finances. Given that our Committee has oversight of the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, my understanding was that there was a port of call to get advice. Did I misunderstand, Danny, that you had sought advice and did not get it?

Danny Stone: Not quite. Advice, yes, but what I had essentially done was a full audit of the rules: I had gone through each and every rule relating to APPGs within the rules and said, "Here is what we are doing on each one. Would you be able to review this entire document and come back to me?" I think that is potentially too much to ask, at the moment at least.

Alberto Costa: Thank you for clarifying that.

Chair: We are way over time already, but Tammy, I think you have a question. Bernard has one, and then I have a couple of small things to raise.

Q160 **Mrs Banks:** Thank you, Chair. First, Natascha, just for clarity and my own peace of mind, did I understand correctly that a member—say, for instance, the RSPCA—may join your organisation because they want to be part of a certain APPG, but you put the money they are providing into a pot that then services all APPGs?

Natascha Engel: Yes.

Mrs Banks: Brilliant. That is really helpful, thank you. One of the things that is playing on my mind and going in circles after talking about transparency is to do with consistency and quality. Suzie, you talk about light-touch terms of reference, and not much reporting; Natascha, you talk about having a process; and Danny, the audit that you have just



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talked about sounds very detailed. One of the things I am wondering, particularly about your organisation, Natascha, is how it is determined which APPG can access you as a secretariat.

Natascha Engel: When an APPG has an AGM, the MPs decide who provides the secretariat at that point. That decision is taken by the MPs when they set up the AGM.

Chair: For the vast majority of APPGs, it is done entirely out of the MP's office.

Q161 **Mrs Banks:** But do you have a right of refusal? That is my point. Could you say, "Actually, no, we are full now for the amount of funding we've got," or "We're focusing on this area this time"? Where do you come into that?

Natascha Engel: We work closely with the APPGs we provide a service for. Let's say an organisation stops servicing a certain APPG and that APPG wants to look for a professional, third-party organisation. They would approach us. It is all done in consultation. There is no sort of— I don't think MPs would sit down at an AGM and decide, "We want this provider," and then be refused. I think it is done in advance, much more informally, so that when it comes to the AGM, it is agreed.

Q162 **Mrs Banks:** They all have equal access to come to you to be the secretariat.

Natascha Engel: Absolutely.

Chair: Andy and then Bernard, because Andy says he is going to ask a very short question.

Q163 **Andy Carter:** I would like to ask this to all of you, but just a very quick response, please. A situation might arise in the aviation sector: we have an APPG for aviation, but the national flag carrier decides we are going to have a British Airways APPG. With your experience of secretariats, do you think it would be appropriate for an individual business to set up an APPG? Suzie, I wonder what your view is on that.

Suzie Tucker: I can't really offer an opinion on that. A comparison from the museum world is that there is an existing APPG for the British Museum. That has been running for a very long time. It is a very eminent institution, obviously, and they provide the secretariat for that APPG. It was felt by lots of people for quite a long time that it was a bit of an omission that there wasn't an APPG for the whole museums sector. Lots of APPGs have grown up organically and it is not necessarily representative of where the interest lies. As I say, when the museums APPG started, over 75 people signed up straight away, which we felt probably demonstrated that there was a great deal of interest.

Natascha Engel: It is MPs and peers who decide what they want to set up APPGs for, so if there is a reason to do so—

Q164 **Andy Carter:** Would you be comfortable in the secretariat for a business's



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APPG?

Natascha Engel: We don't do it.

Danny Stone: It runs a risk of making a mockery of the system. If WWE were to become an APPG, as a wrestling group, you would then have AEW, Ring of Honor, Impact Wrestling—I could see that would be silly and I don't think there would be that much support among Members.

Q165 **Andy Carter:** Marisa, I think you said you had an issue with certain organisations. What is your view on this?

Marisa Heath: I would answer no straight away to your question. We have had an issue. If I said the all-party parliamentary group was going to talk about animals in science, but we wanted to take a pragmatic view and weren't calling for a ban on it, another organisation who wants a ban may say, "We will set up our own APPG for animals in science," for example, which then dilutes the work we are doing and makes it very confusing for people to know the voice to listen to; it puts out conflicting messages. That is an issue we face, because animal welfare can be very conflictual. You could have an APPG for hunting and an APPG that was anti-hunting, for example. You could go on and on.

Q166 **Andy Carter:** In the media sector, we have the BBC—

Chair: Andy, this was to be a quick question.

Andy Carter: Is that appropriate? It is a single body with its own APPG. I wonder if anyone wants to share any views on that. No? Thank you.

Chair: Okay. Bernard, and yours is going to be quick as well.

Q167 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Do any of your APPGs benefit from a parliamentary pass given to somebody under your control who helps with the APPG? This is not unknown.

Suzie Tucker: I can answer that quickly by saying no.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: It is not an accusation, by the way; it is just an inquiry.

Suzie Tucker: We have only been running the group during covid times anyway, but we haven't even considered it because we wouldn't see any reason why any of our staff would need parliamentary passes.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Ms Engel?

Natascha Engel: No.

Danny Stone: I have a pass through Lisa Cameron. It is a voluntary agreement. It is all signed and lodged with the House in the appropriate way.

Q168 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** It always is, but it doesn't necessarily forestall problems. Marisa?



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Marisa Heath: I used to have a pass because I worked for MPs separately in another role, but I have never had a pass for the APPG. Actually, I used to not use it. If I came in for an APPG meeting, I would go through security.

Q169 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Having put all that on the table, how appropriate is it for a Member of Parliament to say, "I'm chairman of this APPG, so I'm going to use one of my passes. Instead of having my own research assistant, I'm giving it to the organisation that is supporting the secretariat of the APPG"? How appropriate is that?

Chair: You can just do thumbs up or thumbs down, if you want.

Danny Stone: I think there are different things at play, to be honest. First, the whole system of passes needs overhaul anyway, because there are too many passes in general. Secondly, the APPG passes were essentially abused, which is why they were withdrawn—that is my understanding. I think there is something positive about it, because you take away the stress on the security services at the door for people who are already security-cleared. I think I put in my evidence that the European Parliament has different set-ups whereby people can have access to, say, one restricted space where they are security-cleared, which may be a model to follow. But I think the whole system actually needs overhaul.

Q170 **Sir Bernard Jenkin:** Ms Engel, do you think the system could do without it?

Natascha Engel: We don't use them, and we don't need to use them. We are perfectly able to do what we do without passes, so it is possible to do without them.

Alberto Costa: Can I just add a point about things being taxpayer-funded? We already have APPGs that are taxpayer-funded—the Chair knows this, as he is the chair of the APPG on Russia. The evidence that we have had submitted for today's meeting from the IPU confirms that up to £10,000 is made available for all-party country-specific groups, so the principle of taxpayer-funded activities for APPGs already exists.

Chair: Just to clarify, the Russia APPG has not taken any money from anybody—whether an oligarch, the British Government or anything else.

Alberto Costa: I'm not suggesting that you have.

Q171 **Chair:** No, I know you're not. I understand the point you are making about the IPU. I was actually going to ask a question about foreign states, because some foreign states support all-party parliamentary groups with benefits in kind and all the rest of it. Other countries forbid this. Do you think we should do the same?

Natascha Engel: I really have no strong opinion on it. We don't do country groups at all, so I don't have a strong opinion on it.

Q172 **Chair:** Anybody else? One of you—I cannot remember who—said right at



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the beginning that Select Committees are really important and that all-party parliamentary groups are a bit similar. Isn't there a danger that they are seen to be rather similar and that a report that comes from an APPG is seen as exactly the same as if it were from a Select Committee—in other words, a report by some MPs? Do you think we should have clearer differentiation between them?

Danny Stone: There used to be less differentiation. Now, there are rules about reports and what have you, and you have to be very clear in reports and on social media channels about it being from an APPG. It is better now than it was.

Q173 **Chair:** But it's an important distinction. What about having all APPG meetings, once we are out of covid and so on, made public rather than just by invitation?

Natascha Engel: I think that is a matter of space, isn't it?

Chair: For the all-party Russia group, we have always made them publicly accessible.

Natascha Engel: In principle, I would not have anything against that. That is logistical rather than anything else.

Q174 **Chair:** One final one. You represent a variety of organisations, and I guess nobody would have any difficulty with organising and providing secretariat, but there are public affairs consultancies and lobbying companies that are providing this. Do you think that we should be drawing a line anywhere? I think Marisa was going to nod.

Marisa Heath: I was just going to say that I take the view that the RSPCA originally employed me to do this role, and the employment terms were very clear. It was as the secretariat for the APPG; it was not as a campaigner, a lobbyist or a public affairs member of staff for the RSPCA. It was specifically that. If any company is employing someone, it should not be that they do the APPG as a part-time bit. It should clearly be what they do, so that they are not conflicting and mixing other pieces of work.

Chair: Okay. The other three?

Natascha Engel: I think it is about transparency, isn't it? It is who is paying for what, as long as that is really clear. It is quite difficult to draw that distinction.

Danny Stone: On the regulation, we are regulated by the Charity Commission as a charity. Is everybody regulated appropriately? If they are, okay.

Chair: Okay. It has been very helpful of you. I am sorry we brought you in late and have kept you longer than we billed, but we are very grateful to you. It has been a very helpful session. Thank you very much.