

Written evidence submitted by AntiSemitism Policy Trust

I write as Chief Executive of the Antisemitism Policy Trust, a charity which provides the secretariat to the APPG Against Antisemitism, and has done so for more than 15 years. I also write as a former parliamentary researcher who provided secretariat support to the APPG on War Crimes and as a volunteer, who supports the newly established APPG on Wrestling.

Taking the items in your call for evidence in turn:

The value and benefits of APPGs to the House:

APPGs bring an important level of expertise into Parliament, adding value to MPs and their offices. The APPG against Antisemitism which has existed for over 15 years in Parliament has been able to offer expert advice not only to MPs and Peers but to Parliamentary staff and committees. A vital benefit of APPGs to the House comes from cross-party working. APPGs offer a platform for MPs to work together regardless of their parties and this is one of only a few spaces where this genuine engagement between parties can take place within Parliament. Over the years, the APPG against Antisemitism has shown the importance of cross-party working, where party politics is put aside to come together against anti-Jewish hatred.

Since taking on the role of secretary to the APPG Against Antisemitism, I have helped support and deliver no less than three cross-party reports into antisemitism and wider harms. In each case, there were multiple benefits. These included but are not limited to:

- Deepening the understanding of MPs and Peers committed to tackling antisemitism
- Assisting those MPs in developing work streams to which they were committed but did not have the time to fully pursue
- Helping the parliamentarians to enact change in various sectors to the betterment of our democracy (for example, judicial training, CPS policy, police training and data collection, electoral candidate training).
- Depoliticising partisan attacks focused on antisemitism, through cross-party activity.

Debates on antisemitism in the House over the past few years in particular, but previously too, were enhanced by briefing efforts organised by the APPG, which we supported and informed. We have also brought together organisations for meetings and events which would have taken parliamentary offices valuable time to research and establish.

The same can be said to be true in relation to the APPG on Wrestling. I have worked in my spare time to support most of the work of that group and I believe the members have found this to be helpful, and reduce the burden on their offices. This has included drafting papers, organising meetings and assisting them to review the industry which is currently entirely unregulated and suffering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I suspect, in the case of both APPGs, were you to ask the MPs involved if the group has proven useful to the House and if the secretariat has fulfilled its role effectively, the answer would be a resounding yes.

Transparency and appropriateness of funding of APPG activities and secretarial support:

The Antisemitism Policy Trust, previously the PCAA Foundation, has always been fully transparent about any support given to parliamentarians leading or involved with the APPG Against Antisemitism. In the main, this relates to the cost of the secretariat service – usually the time of a staff member – and any overseas or UK visits. These are declared collectively for the group, and details are provided to individual parliamentarians so that they can declare any spend. Parliamentarians have, in fact, been the focus of media stories which highlight the donations from the charity because we ensure that these are declared.

Any links to profit making corporations should be expressly identified and declared by every APPG. Any financial payment in kind by foreign governments needs to be specifically identified in more detail by each APPG.

More broadly, consideration should be given to those APPGs that have followed the rules to the letter for decades, and updated their efforts with the rule changes brought in. Whilst a grading system may be inappropriate, perhaps privileges earned over time might be considered and long-established, rule abiding APPGs be recognised in some way.

The role of external secretariats to APPGs

There is a wide variety and disparity in quality and effort between APPGs, in many cases owing either to the leadership of the group or the external secretariat. The APPG Against Antisemitism holds regular events, publishes reports and briefings, issues statements from group officers and so on. The secretariat function is to provide an engine, to motor the

APPG and both shoulder the effort, and advise the members so that the demand on their time is reduced, and that they can broaden opportunities and engagement on their given subject. As a former researcher, I know that the time my member gave to the APPG on War Crimes was relatively limited compared to their wider interests. As an external organisation, we are able to do more by way of logistical support.

As soon as an MP becomes involved in an APPG, they tend to be approached by groups and individuals seeking the parliamentarian's involvement in various events or to take on 'casework'. The load for MPs increases. External organisations, especially where established and reputable, are able to bring expertise to bear on these matters – be it children's charities, health bodies or others – and help support and guide MPs through the myriad of approaches they will receive.

It is however important that an external body not venture outside the remit of the role, that is not to make any statements, or take any action on behalf of the group, nor to speak on its behalf or seek to represent itself as the group. The lead and decisions must always be taken by members. In the case of the APPG Against Antisemitism, we devised an agreement which set out management roles, GDPR responsibility and so on between the APT and the Group. This was agreed by John Mann, the then chair and subsequently by Guto Bebb, the former MP and subsequent chair. We believe this to be an example of best practice and would be pleased to share a copy.

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

This has always been a risk. It is, to my understanding, the reason why blue APPG passes were withdrawn. This ultimately relies on due diligence of the authorities including the parliamentarian's offices, police and perhaps intelligence agencies. It might be that some formal responsibility or incentive for members – such as the ability to chair an APPG – be subject to abuse of the system through lack of due diligence.

Use of Parliamentary passes by staff exclusively supporting APPGs

The use of Parliamentary passes by staff exclusively supporting APPGs is important and necessary to the success of a group. Parliamentary passes for APPGs reduces timewasting for MPs who already have demanding diaries. It also reduces the burden on security staff. In a day when holding multiple meetings with parliamentarians, it is an unnecessary burden on the estate to have people in and out, who are otherwise security cleared and adding value

to parliamentary work. There are other models to consider, like the European Parliament which allows restricted access to particular areas to NGOs, for example.

The proportionality and effectiveness of current requirements on holding of AGMs and formal meetings, and election of officers

The current rules are broadly proportional and effective. They are much improved from 15 years ago. However, APPGs ought to have a higher number of members and officers to pass an APPG standard. This would also ensure that a trustworthy secretariat is appointed. It may be that an APPG needs a certain number of members to authorise the possibility of a pass. The APPG against Antisemitism for example, has over 50 members from all political parties ensuring comprehensive and democratic representation. The chair or designated officers of an APPG should be responsible for named passholders of an APPG.

Financial governance and controls

The APPG Against Antisemitism has no funds, though a financial declaration is prepared as required by the House authorities. The Trust follows all the relevant Charity Commission guidance and files annual accounts.

Other governance and compliance issues, including assurance that APPGs are meeting relevant employment law and data protection laws

As above, the APT organised an agreement with the APPG including on data protection rules.

Status of APPGs within the House, including the risk of confusion with select committees, and branding of APPG activities and publications

This is an issue that was previously addressed. There is now a standard form of wording used on the front of APPG reports, social media feeds and so on, which seeks to address this very issue.

Who should be accountable for ensuring an APPG complies with the rules

Members must be accountable for an APPG they chair. However, placing formal burdens on external groups might be an incentive and one which the Trust would be happy to work with the Committee on.

How APPGs can be better supported to comply with the rules

Regular training would be helpful. Though there is much written material circulated, video conferences or training would be of value.

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