

Press release: MPs' outside interests: Committee publishes report

The Code of Conduct for MPs should be changed to state that outside interests, whether paid or unpaid, should not compromise their principal role as an MP, according to a new report published today by the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life.

The evidence we received for this review demonstrates that there is a wide spectrum of views, both amongst the public and MPs, as well as those who regulate standards for MPs. We also heard convincing arguments about the importance of individual MPs retaining the flexibility to perform their roles in the way they choose, and of Parliament being open to a wide a range of people from different backgrounds and professions.

When we last looked at this issue in our report on MPs' expenses in 2009 ([link](#)), the Committee recommended a balance: that MPs should be able to undertake paid employment, providing that these activities remain within reasonable limits, and that there was transparency. At that time, there was consensus between the parties on this settlement but it is regrettable that the recommendations made then have not been fully implemented by Parliament, MPs and Government.

A majority of MPs do not hold remunerated outside interests, and a number of MPs hold outside interests which would be considered within 'reasonable limits'. However, where a small number of individuals have taken up outside interests beyond what might be considered reasonable, it risks undermining trust in Parliament and Parliamentarians. We are therefore recommending a package of important reforms to address issues concerning MPs' capacity to fulfil their Parliamentary duties and responsibilities to their constituents and to mitigate the potential for undue influence on our political system.

To demonstrate high standards, Parliament needs to be more transparent with the public about the registration and declaration of interests. The Register of Members' Financial Interests must be more accessible, searchable and usable. Voters should know what outside interests Parliamentary candidates intend to hold if they are elected. The Code of Conduct for MPs should be clarified to state that any MP's interests outside the House should not compromise their principal role as MPs. We also recommend that MPs should not undertake outside employment as Parliamentary strategists, advisers or consultants and that the rules on lobbying need to be clearer.

Foremost, MPs themselves should continually demonstrate leadership and integrity, considering how any outside interests might impact on their work in the legislature and be prepared to be fully open and honest with the public about any outside interests they choose to hold.

In line with the Committee's Code of Practice, the three members of the

Committee nominated by the political parties did not take part in formulating the recommendations made in this report. Indeed, they may not necessarily agree with every aspect. We are, however, grateful to our political colleagues for sharing their knowledge and advice on Parliamentary life.

My first report as Chair of this Committee recommended strengthening transparency around lobbying; my final report demonstrates that this continues to be an issue of public concern. As I complete my 5-year term, it is clear that Lord Nolan's principles remain the cornerstone of ethical standards in public life..

Notes to Editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O'Boyle on 07880 740627.