

All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) and researchers: opportunities, what to expect, and suggestions for successful engagement.

This paper aims to guide researchers and Parliamentarians on how best to engage through the mechanism of the All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs). It includes information about APPGs, their structure, the opportunities offered by collaboration as well as potential challenges, and suggestions for successful engagement.

I. For researchers: All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs): what they are, what to expect, how to engage.

What are APPGs?

APPGs are groups composed of backbenchers from both Houses of Parliament with a shared interest in a particular country-area or topic, who engage with civil society organisations, individuals and experts outside Parliament on that topic. They are unusual and valuable in that they bring together MPs and Peers from different parties and political viewpoints. APPGs typically run inquiries on their specialist topic, which often result in published reports. As part of their inquiries, they often hold calls for evidence researchers can respond to, to provide scientific and expert evidence to be used in drawing up their reports. The list of active APPGs is published on the Register of APPGs on the Parliament website, which is updated every six weeks. All APPGs cease to exist when Parliament is dissolved for General Elections. Before Parliament was dissolved in May 2024, the [official Register](#) included 543 APPGs between country groups and subject groups.

Why engage, as a researcher?

For researchers, APPGs represent a way to stay connected with parliamentary business and to promote their research and findings, indirectly influencing policymaking processes. This can increase the visibility of research, enhancing research impact.¹ Contact details for APPGs can be found on the Parliamentary website.

Examples of successful engagement from King's College London (from REF Impact Case Studies 2021):

Definition of Islamophobia: In 2018, Abdoolkarim Vakil, a lecturer at KCL, responded to an enquiry published by the APPG on British Muslims for a definition of Islamophobia. Vakil's definition and research has been incorporated in the report, widely circulated, and eventually contributed to the most-widely adopted definition of Islamophobia in the UK (All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, 2018).

Youth work: in 2019, the APPG on Youth affairs used research by Dr De St Croix as evidence of the highly skilled work played by youth workers in their report, prompting a general debate in the House of Commons in which new funding in bursaries for youth work students was announced (Impact Case Studies Database, 2021a).

¹ For wider suggestions on how to engage in policymaking, and to improve your research impact, see Graham, T. "Engaging with Policy - A Handbook for (KCL) Researchers and Professional Services". Available at:

What are they not?

APPGs are not legislative bodies, nor official Parliamentary bodies, and they have no formal status within Parliament. However, some have high profile members and activity and their reports can generate significant media interest. This can lead to an expectation that all APPGs have the same characteristics whereas in reality, there are significant differences in levels of activity and influence.

APPGs and Select Committees

Select Committees exist in both the Commons and the Lords and are also composed of cross-party representatives. Differently from APPGs, they are formal bodies, established to scrutinise the work of the government and hold it to account. These committees are typically created at the beginning of each parliamentary session and, like APPGs, cease to exist at the end of the session. Select Committees have the power to conduct inquiries, gather evidence, summon witnesses, and request documents. They produce reports based on their findings, which hold significantly more authority than those produced by APPGs. The Government is obliged to respond to Select Committee reports, which often contain recommendations for action or changes to existing policies. These reports inform parliamentary debates and influence decision-making, serving as authoritative documents that can shape public opinion and hold the government accountable for its actions, often leading to policy changes ([Russell and Gover, 2017](#)).

APPGs must, in theory, avoid presenting themselves in a way which makes them confusable with Select Committees (Bowers, 2024, 136). However, many of the activities the two different bodies run are apparently similar. APPGs also run independent inquiries and consult external individuals, charities, advocacy groups, and researchers. They often publish reports based on their inquiries, and some of these reports are referenced by MPs and Peers in Parliament. However, there is no obligation for the Government to respond to APPG reports, and the rigour with which they carry out their research work varies from one group to the other. While some APPG reports are authored by the organisation or charities that informs their work and provides the secretariat, others are authored by independent academics (see box). Therefore, the influence of APPG reports can vary greatly, often depending on the overall impact and influence of the individual APPG and on the networks of the external groups they rely on.

Example of King's research involvement in writing APPG reports:

Creative Diversity: The two 2021 “Creative Majority” and “Making the Creative Majority” reports, and policy recommendations, were the result of two collaborative research projects undertaken by the APPG on Creative Diversity, chaired by Chi Onwurah MP and Baroness Bull, and Professor Roberta Comunian, Dr Natalie Wreyford and Dr Tamsyn Dent at King's Department of Culture, Media and the Creative Industries. The research identified obstacles and key steps to success to improve diversity and inclusion in the workplace within the creative industries. This collaborative project is an example of successful and engagement between APPGs and researchers with positive social impact (King's College London, 2021; Wreyford, O'Brien and Dent, 2021; Comunian, Dent et al., 2023).

APPG structure: Regulations, funding, benefits, and external secretariats

APPGs have to follow certain rules in order to be officially recognised as such. Rules concern membership, meetings, registration of benefits, transparency and more. APPG rules have recently been updated in 2023, and a full list of rules can be found in the [All-Party Parliamentary Groups Guide to the Rules](#), published by the Committee on Standards in 2023

APPGs can receive funding and benefits from various external stakeholders. This includes external funding, which enables them to carry out research and to conduct public-facing events, creating networks beyond Parliament on particular topics and issues. Updated rules require them to declare sums higher than £1500 from a single source per calendar year, but they can receive indirect support in the form of external secretariat assistance (Bowers, 2024, 137).

The possibility of receiving funding and administrative support from external organisations has clear advantages for the groups themselves, as well as for individuals and organisations outside Parliamentary circles. For APPGs, it offers them the possibility of remaining well-informed on evidence, research and new trends on topics of interest, especially where members are likely to lack the time and capacity to gather this data themselves. It also allows them to remain actively engaged with these topics, by collaborating with experts and relevant organisations to help run and organise the groups' activities and carry out in-depth and evidenced research. However, this possibility also opens up the possibility of lobbying from charities, external organisations, and lobbying groups.

The secretariat of APPGs is often provided by charities, who help with organisational and administrative support of their activities. Examples of charities driving and influencing APPGs' work include the British Dyslexia Association, which has run the Secretariat of the APPG for Dyslexia and other Learning Disabilities since 2017 ([British Dyslexia Association, 2024](#)); Crisis UK, which has run the Secretariat of the APPG for Ending Homelessness since 2018 ([Crisis, 2024](#)), and Uplift, a UK-based non-for-profit organisation that held the secretariat for the APPG on climate change ([Climate APPG, 2024](#)). Some APPGs, especially when backed by charities and NPOs that are active in their field, can have a significant voice in policy and legislation. The APPG on Climate Change, for example, launched a yearly climate report and publishes briefings on current legislation around climate change ([Climate APPG, 2024](#)); and the APPG for ending Homelessness publishes reports on the government's progress in its targets towards homelessness ([All Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness, 2023](#)).

Potential challenges and concerns

However, think tanks, charities and campaigning organisations are not the only entities allowed to provide funding and services to APPGs. A 2015 study found that corporations contributed the largest source of monetary donations and benefits to APPGs ([Thomas, 2015](#)). The involvement of private corporations has raised concerns over inappropriate lobbying and corruption within the UK Parliament. Reports by Open Democracy and The Guardian found that, for example, private healthcare and weapons companies were among the key funders of relevant APPGs (Hovhannisyan et al, 2022; Syal and Barr, 2017). In some instances, foreign governments have been found to be involved in the activities and secretariats of APPGs, including China and Azerbaijan ([Hovhannisyan et al, 2022](#)). The benefits that country groups received from foreign governments included funded travel to foreign countries, which in some instances even raised concerns over inappropriate behaviour abroad and sexual tourism ([Webber and Gallardo, 2022](#)).

However, private firms appeared to fund a small and specific number of groups. In contrast, charities were found to support a major number of APPGs, and to have a stronger influence in the recent growth in number of APPGs in the UK (Thomas, 2015). The undue influence due to lobbying and funding has been mitigated by the new rules established in 2023, however, some still voice concerns over less direct forms of influence still making their way through regulations (Bowers, 2024, 138).

Varied outcomes and influence

Due to the diversity of their structures, topics, and support mechanism, the roles, actions, nature, and scope of APPGs are wide and varied. Consequently, different APPGs exhibit varying degrees of influence, engagement, priority, and organization. These differences also depend on the policy priorities of the incumbent government and on issues of high public interest that arise from factors external to Parliament. According to Marisa Heath, who runs the APPG on animal welfare, “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” (Heath, quoted in Bowers, 2024, 136).

Engaging with APPGs as a researcher can be a good idea, especially to open or shape policy dialogue according to new research evidence, but it does not exclude challenges. In fact, as often APPGs’ work is guided by the agenda of a charity or public sector organisation, this might influence the policy priorities or the structure of the groups’ meetings.

Concluding remarks

Summing up, a few concluding remarks can be made:

1. APPGs should not be confused with Select Committee or other official government bodies, and their institutional role should not be confused. They hold no official role in the UK Parliament, and thus engaging with them does not constitute a direct link to government. However, engagement can be useful for researchers to make their research visible, to grow their research impact, and to build a network with parliamentarians and policymakers.
2. As APPGs are often associated to the work of relevant charities and civil society organisations in their sector of interest, they might already have a source of evidence coming from the work of these charities. This also means that their policy objectives and directions are likely to align with the aims of the charities/organisations they are linked with. It does not mean they would not be responsive to further research evidence, however, so getting in touch with the relevant charity could be a good idea for researchers, as it can enable them to use an already established channel to disseminate their research via APPGs.
3. In light of what has been discussed above, some APPGs can be less responsive than others. Ultimately, it depends on many factors, including how active and engaged the group is, whether they are influenced by the priorities of external funding bodies, or whether the topic of interest is currently a policy priority Parliamentary issues. Research and due diligence on an APPG’s work can reveal insights as to whether the group’s topical interests currently align with those of the researchers willing to engage. Staying up to date with APPGs’ work is advisable for researchers, as APPGs will often publish calls for evidence and enquiry to which researchers can respond.

4. Despite existing controversies surrounding the work of some APPGs, the influence of improper lobbying, and independently of the adequacy of the new rules in tackling issues of external influence, APPGs cover an important role in the UK Parliament and the policymaking process. They constitute a unique window for policymakers within Westminster to stay abreast with current news, evidence and factors happening outside immediate government discussions. As pointed out by Bowers, they have a useful political role, and should they be formally abolished, they would still appear in a different form (Bowers, 2024, 139).
5. Therefore, given that the infrastructure is there, the most effective strategy is to benefit from it from both perspectives: use the groups to inform policymaking through providing them with the most accurate, up-to-date and reliable evidence – while, at the same time, carrying out some due diligence wherever possible. This would create more positive precedents and, on a large scale, improve the overall reputation of the work of APPGs, while increasing research impact. Both researchers and higher education institutions can play an active role in improving this engagement and getting the most out of it.

Engaging with APPGs: suggestions for researchers

As APPGs constitute platforms for Parliamentarians to engage with individuals and organisations outside formal Government structures, engaging with APPGs as a researcher can still be a useful platform to create connections with parliamentary networks with a relevant interest with one's research topic and field, and to gain a broader perspective of where one's research sits among policy dialogues and priorities.

1. **Find a relevant APPG:** The register online contains a list of all APPGs, each containing information on their secretariats. Researchers can get in touch with the secretariats to explore the groups' interests and ways to get involved, as well as attend public meetings to get to know members informally.
2. **Get in touch with the secretariat:** If the APPG's secretariat is run by an external organisation or charity, it might be useful to get in touch with them and engage with their work. It will likely be relevant to your own research, and your research is more likely to be featured in the APPG work, for example through presentations at APPG meetings, or in their reports.
3. **Respond to inquiries or send out research briefings:** Many APPGs run calls for research enquiries in their specific topics of interest. Responding to these enquiries is a good way to directly engage with APPGs and a good chance to have your work mentioned in APPG report. However, research briefings can be sent independently and not necessarily as a response to a call for evidence.

Giulia D'Aquila, PhD Candidate, Lau China Institute, King's College London
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Resources on engagement with APPGs:

[Policy Bristol Hub: APPGs and policy impact](#)

[UCL: Engaging with All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#)

[Imperial Policy Forum: How to effectively engage with APPGs](#)

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