

Senedd Standards of Conduct Committee – Review of Cross-Party Groups

September 2022

Introduction

ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning. We also convene the further education (FE) Principals' Forum which represents Further Education colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity.

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senedd's Standards of Conduct Committee consultation on Senedd Cross-Party Groups.

1. What are your views on the arrangements for Cross-Party Groups in the Senedd?

- 1.1 ColegauCymru is broadly content with the current arrangements. It must be recognised that the numerous Senedd CPGs operate in different ways and cover a diverse range of subject matter. If used effectively, they can act as vehicles to advocate/lobby on particular issues to interested Members of the Senedd and potentially Ministers, if invited and able to attend. This can result in action such as the use of appropriate Senedd channels for oral or written questions, debates, 90-second statements etc.
- 1.2 Looking across the UK to Scotland, CPGs have more rules and regulations in comparison to Wales, even though, as in Wales, they are not considered formal Parliamentary business. It therefore may be useful to look to other nations' arrangements for best practice.

2. Have you got any concerns or encountered any problems with the arrangements? If so, what?

- 2.1 Ensuring that up to date minutes and meeting information appears on the Senedd website can be a lengthy process due to the fact that many different people are involved, i.e. the Secretariat must contact the Chair's office, who then forwards the minutes to the Senedd Commission for publication. If there is staff sickness or holidays this process can take weeks. This goes contravenes rules set by the Senedd which states that all minutes must be on the website within four weeks of the meeting taking place. We would therefore suggest that the process for updating the CPG page on the Senedd website become more streamlined.
- 2.2 Pre-covid, ColegauCymru CPGs were generally held in person under 'Chatham House' rules. However, with the need for meetings to be held virtually during Covid, the opportunity for recording has risen. There should be clarity in the CPG rules about the process for deciding whether what is said during online meetings remains private or can be recorded and published if desired and agreed by the

group. ColegauCymru suggests that it should be made clear that the decision should rest with the individual CPG and its attendees but that there should be a method of noting this.

- 2.3 The Senedd should explore how to more strongly encourage MS attendance to ensure that meetings are genuinely cross-party. Scottish Parliament CPG rules state that all meetings must be attended by at least 2 MSPs who are registered members of the Group. This could mean a limit as to how many groups Members are permitted to join. This would hopefully lessen Members' workload, and ensure their commitments the CPGs.
- 2.4 In order for a CPG to remain useful and effective, we would suggest a rule around a minimum number of meetings a year. The Scottish Parliament CPG rules state that all CPGs must hold at least two formal meetings per year, and one of these being the AGM. While Wales may not want to run the Senedd in the same way as the Scottish Parliament, it would be useful to look at best practice across the different nations.
- 2.5 We would also suggest that there needs to be a clear set of expectations about what a CPG can and cannot do. The vast majority of currently registered CPGs would seem to have a link to some sort of public benefit rather than straying into commercial interests

3 Do the current rules reflect the functions and responsibilities of Cross-Party Groups, as you understand them?

- 3.1 Yes, however clarity is needed around the points raised above.

4 Are there any further steps that could be taken to increase transparency for Cross-Party Groups? If so, what?

- 4.1 According to the CPG rules for operation, membership must include Members from at least three political groups represented within the Senedd. However, it is not stated in the rules that Members from three political parties must be in attendance at each meeting. In order to increase transparency and ensure CPGs are respectful of the democratic process, we would suggest that there must be clarity in the rules around Member attendance. Meetings only attended by the Chair or one party Member are not genuinely cross-party.
- 4.2 Even though CPGs are not official Parliamentary business, the work carried out by the group must be open to scrutiny.

- 4.3 The way group business is agreed should be evidenced in the minutes, therefore clear and accurate minute taking is essential for transparency. However, records should still be concise and not overly bureaucratic.
- 4.4 Once minutes have been agreed upon by the group, the process of publication on the Senedd website must be simple and prompt so that external stakeholders are able to access the information as quickly as possible.

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