

#2



COMPLETE

Collector: Web Link (Web Link)

Started: Wednesday, October 23, 2013 7:06:22 AM

Last Modified: Wednesday, October 23, 2013 7:31:02 AM

Time Spent: 00:24:40

IP Address: 82.71.191.121

PAGE 1: About you

Q1: What's your organisation called?

Quakers in Britain

Q2: What's your email address (so we can get in touch if we need to)?

jessicam@quaker.org.uk

Q3: Where in the UK is your organisation based (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland)?

Quakers in Britain includes England, Scotland and Wales

PAGE 2: Third party campaigning

Q4: What sort of campaigning does your organisation want to do ahead of elections (irrespective of legislation at this stage)?

This depends on what happens to be an issue at the time. I suspect that Quakers in Britain will wish to raise awareness of economic justice, welfare reform, environmental concerns, militarisation of civil society, drones, prison reform and nuclear weapons.

Q5: Is policy campaigning important ahead of elections in a democracy? If so, why? And what is your organisation trying to achieve?

My personal view is that policy campaigning, in as far as that means raising awareness, spreading information and debating concerns, is important ahead of elections. However, there is also much policy campaigning which goes on regardless of whether an election is happening – campaigns which happen to coincide with elections or long-running campaigns which take place over a period of ten years or more – which should not be restricted simply because they happen to occur at the same time as an election.

Quakers in Britain seeks to change the minds of decision makers on key issues. For example, we do not believe that Trident is a necessary or effective use of resources. This is in line with our long-standing Peace Testimony, and is an issue we have spoken out on for many years and will continue to speak out on. Another example is marriage equality which Quakers had been considering for many years before making a decision to lobby the Government in 2009. It was a coincidence that our campaign in favour of equal marriage occurred the year before an election.

Q6: Is it right that civil society organisations - from charities and campaigning groups to community groups, bloggers and think tanks - should seek to influence the policy positions of political parties, elected politicians and candidates? If so why?

If a voluntary organisation has been set up with the specific aim of influencing policy position, or has been associated with a policy position for a considerable period of time, it seems fair that that organisation should not be excluded from trying to influence the view of elected representatives and those seeking election. Seeking to change the minds of those in power is not the same as seeking to change those in power.

Q7: Is it right that voters should understand politicians' policy positions and what civil society think about these positions? Or would that information unduly influence voters?

It seems appropriate that the public be kept informed, for example through hustings and public meetings. I would not think that voters wishing to understand the policy positions of elected representatives or candidates would place an undue influence on those elected representatives or candidates.

Q8: What principles should the regulation of campaigning activity ahead of elections be based on?

Fairness, integrity, and the recognition that many groups are campaigning alongside elections rather than for elections.

PAGE 3: The existing law

Q9: What transparency is needed in relation to donors who give money towards a campaign run by a civil society organisation? (e.g. size of donations that should be made public, timescale ahead of elections, whether donations explicitly for election-related campaigning should be published or all donations to organisations that campaign ahead of elections)

Respondent skipped this question

Q10: Are you concerned about any current lack of transparency about campaigning activity by civil society organisations ahead of elections or the money that funds them? If so please give an example.

Respondent skipped this question

Q11: Should the regulation of campaigning activities by civil society organisations be based on regulation for political parties? (Eg. Should spending limits for be based on a percentage of political party spending? Should definitions of campaigning activity be based on that of political parties? If so, why?)

While some voluntary and civil society organisations should be regulated, it is not always appropriate for them to be regulated in the same way as political parties. Religious organisations are broader than political parties, while single-issue campaigning groups are narrower – yet both are part of civil society and both are "voluntary organisations".

Q12: Do you think the existing law regulating civil society campaigning ahead of elections works, or are changes needed? What changes, if any, would you propose and why?

There is a real need to differentiate between overarching groups and regional groups. The Quakers are a good example. We are one church and one religion, and we talk about ourselves as "Quakers in Britain". However, we are registered (as are many, many other churches) as 75-odd charities. The overarching charity is called Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and it employs over 100 staff and has trustees but no "members". Under BYM are 70-odd Area Meetings (AMs), some of which employ one or two people and have "members", and are also registered charities. Under the AMs are 475-odd Local Meetings (LMs) which are a bit like the local parish churches and are not registered charities but are parts of the AMs. I myself am Quaker – I worship at Westminster LM, so I am a member of London West AM (as that's the AM Westminster LM belongs to), and as it happens I am employed by BYM. The question is this: what if BYM produces leaflets about peace which do not promote a particular candidate, but I take these to Westminster LM where another member of London West AM holds a public meeting and hands out BYM's leaflets with the message "consider peace/Syria/Iraq when you vote". Who is the liable organisation – BYM or London West AM?

Q13: Part 2 of the Lobbying Bill proposes to introduce changes to the current regulation of non-party campaigning ahead of elections - how do you think they would affect your organisation's campaigning activity? You may wish to draw on your organisation's plans for the next General Election, or on campaigns you ran at the last election.

These changes create considerable uncertainty. I do not know how they might affect Quakers in Britain.

PAGE 4: Impact of the Lobbying Bill Part 2 - case studies

Q14: Are there specific examples of campaigning activity that you have planned, or that has happened in the past, which: a) could not happen under the Lobbying Bill, or which you think would be affected b) would be much more difficult under the Lobbying Bill c) you would be deterred from carrying out for fear of coming close to or falling foul of the law

Sent as part of the PDF.

PAGE 5: The new limits & the passage of the legislation

Q15: Do you agree with the new expenditure threshold for third parties registering with the Electoral Commission? (£5,000 in England, £2,000 in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) If not, why not? Do you have any suggestions for what the thresholds should be?

Respondent skipped this question

Q16: Do you agree with the new limits, including staff costs, on non-part political spending in the 12 months leading up to an election? (£320,000 in England, £35,000 in Scotland, £24,000 in Wales and £11,000 in Northern Ireland) If not, why not? What do you think the limit should be?

Respondent skipped this question

Written Evidence - Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement

Q17: Do you agree with the limits on constituency spending as set out in the Bill? (£9,750 per constituency in the year before an election) If not, why not? What limits do you think would be appropriate?

Respondent skipped this question

Q18: If your organisation is based in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, what do you think the particular effects would be on your campaigning activity ahead of elections? You might want to consider the implications for devolved administration elections and any differences in how civil society engages with politics and democratic processes.

Respondent skipped this question

Q19: Do you think there should be a pause in the passage of Part 2 of the Lobbying Bill? If yes, why? How long do you think a pause would be needed?

Due to the levels of uncertainty, a pause would seem appropriate. I would support 12 weeks of consultation, as recommended by Cabinet Office Guidance.

Q20: If this Bill passes, do you think the Electoral Commission should consult civil society before drafting guidance? If so how would your organisation expect to be consulted?

I would expect Quakers in Britain and other faith groups to be contacted by the Electoral Commission, and would hope for a meeting to discuss our working practices.

PAGE 6: Any final thoughts?

Q21: Please share any other thoughts your organisation has for the Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement.

We are concerned that this Bill could be interpreted in such a way as would curtail the legitimate activities of faith groups. My faith compels me to speak out on issues of social injustice, peace and equality, and to restrict my ability to so would be to prevent me from practicing my religion.