

Submission to Bill Writing Team /Electoral Commission

Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and trade Union Administration Bill

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Introduction

This information is shared to inform the consideration and development of the above Bill and subsequent departmental guidance, Electoral Commission guidance and Charity Commission guidance that would be published prior to the electoral cycle May 2014- May 2015 in relation to that legislation.

Underpinning our submission is a desire that young people, currently the lowest proportion of the electorate voting, become the most active, and that this requires not only encouragement to vote but reasons why – vitally this needs to include the prospect or potential that they can influence policies, party positions and manifesto in the run up to an election. The charitable objects and purposes of our charity are to advance spiritual, educational and physical welfare of young people and our Article and Memorandum specially include campaigning.

Intent

We understand that it is not the intent of the Bill or consequent guidance to inhibit the previous and continuing activities of charities, and in particular our charity, to engage in campaigning in a political context in the run up to an election.

Examples

The next page includes some examples of our proposed activity for 2015 – which aims to educate and inform the electorate to allow them to make informed decisions when voting, and inform and influence the prospective candidates, parties and others to consider or adopt policies based on the campaigning and lobbying activity shared as a result. All within the bounds of not supporting specific candidates or parties explicitly. Our intentions are to educate, inform and influence – but that voters draw their own conclusions from that information shared, to make their own minds up.

Recommendations

We recommend that either legislation or guidance:

1/ Specifically refers to charities like ours who are engaged in democratic engagement activities including:

- a/ a general nature of engagement in elections – campaign for voter registration, or
- b/ issue-based campaigns, upon which parties will or could have a view, because they are inherent in that voter – party – candidate - potential Government relationship, dialogue that is part of the democratic process of voter education

And determine that they lie outside the requirement to register – citing what specific conditions are met (comply with all Charity Commission requirements/avoid party endorsement) to ensure they do so.

We believe such references in guidance will give charities with limited legal resources a framework against which they can test their plans, budgets, and content, and provide sufficient defence against malicious accusations of breaching their charitable activities.

2/ We are invited to input or collaborate on the production of guidance - e.g. on drafts, in confidence, as part of the charities ongoing relationship with the Cabinet Office, and youth input into Government policy.

Examples:

1/ The production of popular based views, beliefs and measures contained in a written Youth Manifesto e.g. BYC or UKYP Youth Manifesto/ or manifesto created specifically for an election.
http://www.byc.org.uk/media/193980/byc_manifesto_2012-14_web.pdf

2/ The creation of a website/ coalition campaign website which not only makes a case – but lists MPs or candidates who sign up to that website. Votes at 16 Coalition. BYC 2010 Pledgebank website listed candidates:

<http://www.pledgebank.com/bycGEC>

3/ The creation of a table of key campaign objectives and the listing of all major party positions on the issues nationally – but without recommendation

4/ The creation of the constituency map of candidates intentions against youth policy campaigns identifying where all candidates stand on those issues (eg a website site where you locate your constituency to review their views)

5/ Rallies, events and marches to which all major parties are invited to speak, take part or march with general compares and contrast to the charities views

6/ The creation of a pledge campaign - with names and photos of those from particular parties posted on a website.

6/ Specific campaign themes rally, event, Question Time or march - to which all candidates are invited to take part – but only some do.

Candidates

We gather that if candidates themselves choose to align themselves with our positions or campaigns (which could be to their disadvantage as well as advantage) does not put us at risk or liability