

# DELTA POLL

**delta** – Variation of a variable or function – A finite increment – A defined change.



**MPs' Outside Interests**

**Focus Group Review**

**A research report from Deltapoll**

**May 2018**

## Background and methodology

In response to the MPs' expenses revelations of 2009, the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) recommended that "reasonable limits" should apply to the outside interests of MPs, so long as paid employment was both transparent and that information about it was available to voters at election time.

As we approach the ten-year anniversary of the events that are considered to have had a profound impact on public perceptions of ethical standards among elected representatives, the Committee decided to undertake a review of its recommendations - focussing on the extent to which the reasonable limits compromise has proved workable and satisfies public expectations of sitting MPs.

As part of its consultation exercise, the Committee commissioned Deltapoll to undertake small-scale indicative qualitative public opinion research to understand how public reactions to the subject of outside interests have evolved. The core themes that the Committee wished to explore included:

- ⇒ The role that MPs undertake, including perceptions of what their day-to-day working life looks like;
- ⇒ How and why public concern about MPs' outside interests arises;
- ⇒ The extent to which there are concerns about whether MPs' outside interests could lead to undue influence or conflicts of interest;
- ⇒ What could determine the 'reasonable limits' on MPs' outside interests: including, time, money, and type of job; and
- ⇒ Whether there is sufficient transparency to the public, and what kind of information on MPs' outside interests people would be interested in engaging with.

Deltapoll conducted two focus groups in Windsor on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018.

Both groups were comprised of a mix of gender and were recruited across social and economic categories BC1C2. The first group recruited people from the 45-64 age band, and the second from younger 25-44 band. All participants were 'interested' in politics and their views on the 'behaviour' of MPs covered both positive and negative assumptions. A total of nine participants were present in one group, and ten in the other.

Qualitative research is an interactive process between researcher and participants: its strength is in allowing participants' attitudes and opinions to be explored in detail, providing an insight into the key reasons underlying their views. However, discussion results are based only on a small cross-section of the public, especially when budgetary considerations limited the number of focus group sessions to just two. As a result, both Deltapoll and CSPL recognise the limited nature of the qualitative investigation, outcomes from which (reported here) should be considered to be indicative rather than a full evidence base. Further, the design features employed imply that outcomes cannot be taken to be necessarily representative of the wider population.

## Research findings

### The perceptual base: life of an MP

There is little reason to think that perceptions of MPs' day-to-day lives are well-developed, or indeed even particularly accurate. Numerous people have met local MPs on sporadic occasions (but with Theresa May being a local incumbent there is probably a higher recognition factor than might ordinarily be the case elsewhere). Such events, such as visiting schools, are taken somewhat lightly – just MPs doing what they do, or even viewed cynically.

Outside of those very select few people whose professional or personal lives have brought them into direct and more substantive contact with an elected representative, impressions tend to be conditioned by two different types of experience:

1. Isolated incidents where paths have crossed, either physically or (even less frequently) as a result of an issue being raised in writing.
2. Through media impressions, which tend to be through a negative lens if national or (worse) tabloid stories emerge, or a positive one if local newspapers are reporting.

In light of this there is no clear view on whether or not MPs are hardworking, with responses typically gravitating toward the 'some are, some are not' middle way. Top line impressions very much feed into this too, and in some ways, it is understandable how 'some are not' impressions gain traction. For example, the most prevalent observation that people have of MPs is at PMQs, with leaders typically offering up back-and-forth debate to which the public has become very accustomed to and frustrated by. This is probably an even bigger influence on public sentiment (in this context) than is generally thought, because it obscures other work that MPs might think should be taken for granted but which is largely invisible to the public eye.

Indeed, beyond PMQs' adversarial environment, MPs are thought to have done themselves few favours, with other parliamentary debates shown on TV to be sparsely attended. This feeds into prejudicial accusations of laziness, providing the kind of with-my-own-eyes evidence that people need in order to validate self-created impressions, especially incorrect ones.

It takes some scratching away of the surface to extract deeper insight, or at least contradictory evidence to raise doubt about collective inactivity. It does not help that few people know what the role of MP actually involves, because this allows cynicism to creep in, but some realisation that there is much more to life than sitting in the Parliamentary theatre "making strange noises" is apparent. Some are able to reflect on the multi-faceted role of MP, for example juggling committee responsibilities with constituency casework, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

For most, wider perceptions about MPs' behaviour trumps appreciation of any hard work they do, evidence for which courses through this report, although it should be

*I have not met an MP before so I don't know what it would be like.*

*I met Philip Hammond when Weybridge medical centre burnt to the ground. He decided to come and have a look.*

*I've not met one but I've written to my MP several times, but you know it was yeah, yeah.*

*If you read the tabloids you're going to get the worst of it. You're going to see some form of scandal....but if you read your local paper you'll tend to see the actual impact they have in their local area.*

*Genuinely, while they're there they are pretty occupied, it's just we don't see that. We only see them in the Chamber.*

*I've seen them on the news, speaking in Parliament, and then they pan out there's hardly anybody there. And I'm thinking, what are they doing?*

*I know they go to Parliament, bicker back and forth, but no-one really knows what they do.*

*When they are actually in the Palace of Westminster a lot of them are doing committee work....a majority of MPs will be involved in committees, advisory groups, that sort of thing.*

*They are more hard working than we are aware of because a lot of the work they do and time they put in isn't visible and that is a matter for them.*

remembered that an equally prevailing view was that generalisation of collective behaviour was probably inaccurate, and that plenty of both hard-working and less hard-working MPs sit in the House.

There is, though, one component of MPs' lives which was seen as requiring hard work: getting elected. There is slightly more nuance to this observation than the usual "we only ever see them at election time", with the idea contaminating perceptions of MP attitudes toward work once they've made it into parliament. There is a minor undercurrent that implies that the payoff for a successful campaigning effort is an easy life thereafter at Westminster, with hard work done and dusted, rather than now confronting elected representatives.

Further, there is little doubt that once in situ, unethical or indeed illegal actions of individuals (and by the collective group, in for example, the oft-mentioned expenses scandal) are believed to have contaminated the collective reputation of MPs. Partially jokey references to call-girl use and of duck house purchases are fairly obviously no such thing, but fury at inadvisable behaviour vented by proxy. These commonly expressed examples sustain the belief that a system has broken down, and that MPs are able to take advantage – human nature dictates that they will.

So-called 'career politicians' are also viewed suspiciously in the extreme, by some, although others understood that a conventional path into Parliament, that may include internal party research departments for example, was a natural one for a prospective MP to take. For the former though, machine politics or established paths to power are viewed as the antithesis of what being an MP should be about – diligence, hard-work on behalf of constituents and passion for their cause are requirements engrained in the public psyche. A self-serving fast-track to Downing Street is patently not something that most participants want to contemplate; ironic perhaps, given that their own MP is currently resident.

But all of this this is not to say that reputational negativity is complete, because hope and expectation that MPs are in politics for the right reasons underpin participant value-judgements. Even the most cynical or critical participants want to believe that MPs have good intentions and have the desire to make tangible improvements to people's lives. Indeed, it is this kind of impassioned hope that drives even the most cynical to the ballot box – positive messaging around which would have the emotional firepower to persuade the public of the good works that elected representative are routinely involved with.

There is also some sympathy for MPs, or at least a feeling that MPs are human beings with the usual human frailties. It is likely that views along these lines are infrequently expressed - and well covered over with more general and well documented complaints - but they do perhaps help explain why shoulders are typically shrugged at the latest MP to fall foul of regulations or tabloid exposé, rather than being subject to more active public calls to action. This was particularly the case among more affluent or more highly socially ranked participants.

Recognition such as this partially broke consensus in the groups, opening up the possibilities of more thoughtful diagnosis of MPs' collective behaviour. The 'Blob Tree' exercise very much helped to probe this, allowing participants to rationalise what life might look like if their own feet were placed in MP shoes. Each Blob

*I get the impression that they put a lot of hard work getting to where they want to be, but then they think: we can put our feet up now.*

*I do feel that some get lost along the way but maybe that's just what happens. You know some try to keep it clean but you do get so frustrated. Oh you know, I didn't mean to use that call-girl – it's not my fault! That makes me so cross.*

*Yes, the duck pond, the moat. It was outrageous.*

*I think they all want to help.....they're doing it because they care about what they're talking about – trying to raise people up, help them out.*

*I have to believe that these people who are representing me are hard working and up for public service. That is what MPs are meant to be.*

*I think it (their reputation) is pretty poor, but then I try to put myself in their situation.... and think: what would I do? I probably would not do much different.*

*The average back-bencher is like a normal person trying to do their job.*

represented a specific emotion, one that reflected a super-imposed view of what an MP might feel about their own role.

Perhaps nothing better encapsulated the black and white nature of perception that MPs have to confront or ensure. In equal measure, chosen Blobs either depicted a self-celebratory and/or self-absorbed, cushy existence - gleefully highlighting positive aspects of their life, or they were the opposite – miserably suffering from failing expectations, scandal, or terminal career implications for the merest slip of the tongue.

Pretty much the same situation played out when participants were asked to select the Blob that best represented how well or badly-off MPs were perceived to be – only this time there were many more smiles on Blob faces than frowns. As we might have predicted, most people think that MPs are very well remunerated (their actual salary being accurately cited in both focus groups) and also benefit from generous expense accounts, help with staffing costs, and other attractions. Much of this is heavily contextualised by participants own financial standing, with lower earners rarely conceding that £75k per year is insufficient.

But the few participants who did chose a Blob that indicated some form of financial struggle raised important points spontaneously. One, an ex-supermarket manager chose an unhappy, seated Blob who, it was felt, endured a level of responsibility that was not commensurate with salary, which was materially lower than his own used to be.

Another reflected on the apparent ineffectuality of MPs - a back-bench existence thought to naturally limit their power to generate substantive change. This reflection goes to the heart of public expectations: if, as so many ventured, the role of MP is to deliver improvement in public services and human lives - but their standing in parliament restricts them from being able to do so – then it is inevitable that there would recognition of both personal dissatisfaction (or at least self-doubt) among MPs and frustration among the public.

Pointing out that MPs' parliamentary powers were limited did not prevent the same participants from demanding that more or all of MPs time should be fully devoted to parliamentary activity. Initial instincts were very much to demand time-and-motive evidence of commitment to the role, normalised in comparison to any other job (like their own) which required full and undivided attention. This demand or expectation was justified later in the groups by further recourse to their own situations. A teacher, for example, remonstrated that she could not leave the pupils to “teach themselves” while she pursued other interests such as book writing; another participant suggested that if extra hours were available to MPs then they should be using them to improve their own performance – as distractions prevent anyone from reaching peak professional performance.

For some then, the idea that MPs are not working full time is preposterous and bordering on outrage, but even these strongly held views can be - if not compromised – then diluted somewhat through more nuanced understanding of MPs and the nature of their working life. For others still, there is sympathy and room for compromise. One particularly entrepreneurial participant ventured that MPs could do “what the you want so long as they are putting in the hours and doing

*No 19 swinging on a rope. Nice expense account, reasonable salary, four years minimum and then pension afterwards thank you very much.*

*They are in free-fall at the moment. There is all this scandal coming out constantly and they are competing with that fear what is going to come out about them and nothing is going the way we want to....*

*Compared to me I'd say number 1. Right at the top.*

*Two feet firmly on the ground indicates financial stability. Smiling arms open and that pose is similar to our new Home Secretary.*

*If I was them I would feel I have a huge responsibility and I don't think their base salary reflects that responsibility when you compare it to other private sector jobs.*

*Most MPs they're not that important. They're not in the Cabinet, not PM, not at the top.....so they're in the middle of everything, standing around smiling and thinking I'm doing some good but actually they're not doing anything.*

*No, it should be a full time job the same as everyone else. You can't split your time, you can't be in two places at once. It's enough to be dealing with your constituency and representing them in parliament as well as your party and yourself. You can't do that on part time basis.*

*It should be your main job and that's it. That should be your role and that's what you should be doing.*

their job efficiently” although that was an isolated contribution and contradicted the idea that MPs had limited ability to perform. For most though, the simple truth was that the role of MP should be full time, but – and this is the key - outside interests might come into play outside of parliamentary hours.

### Outside interests

Few were shocked at the prospect of MPs *actually* having outside interests. Many were aware in a vague way, a few offered specific examples including that of Non-Executive Directorships (NEDs) and one cited the example of George Osborne taking the Evening Standard’s Editor role, although awareness that he’d since resigned as an MP was missing.

The vagueness was linked to (lack of) knowledge on the hours spent doing the job of MP. Even in recognising that NED positions were held, the same participant implied that work on them was probably done out of hours, in spare time essentially. It did not seem to occur that MPs could be working on non-parliamentary work within parliamentary hours, possibly because of an assumption that MPs’ time is regulated or managed like that of most other working people. Others concurred, with after-dinner speaking presented as another opportunity to take up outside of parliamentary time.

However, there was almost uniform consistency in the view that whatever outside interests were taken up, there could be no tolerance of any conflict of interest. This appeared to be an important principle, an unbreakable bond between elected and represented. For some, it meant that any form of outside employment by private companies was off-limits, compromising the ethical responsibility an MP has to their constituents.

The conflict appeared to apply as much to time taken as it did to financial gain. This idea circled back to the demand that all spare time be dedicated to the role of MP – any wastage of parliamentary time implies that commitment to the job is not 100% and by corollary that performance is never as good as it could be. This was seen to be a breach of the dedication that MPs should have to their constituents.

There was particular concern about the possibility of parliamentary influence being framed by financial gain. ‘Lobbying’ may have become a dirty word, but certainly voting or acting in a way that results in personal financial advantage is a line that cannot be crossed by any MP. On a simplistic level this was simply a matter of being in the pay of corporation X, but for others it cast a longer shadow over objectivity, independence and what being an MP was all about. An easy solution, it was suggested, would be for their interests to be declared and for any MP to be disqualified from contributing to a debate in which their vested interest was of material relevance.

In raising the prospect of different kinds of outside interest possibilities though, doubt and not a little confusion presented itself. Both sets of participants were asked to consider a set of possible outside interest opportunities, assessing in each case the level of acceptability as a possible outside interest, and whether or not there was the potential for a conflict of interest. Although the chart overleaf simplifies the responses by giving an indicative mean outcome, the variation in response – and moreover, the variation in reasons for responding in the ways

*They could be doing really well at what they’re doing but if they could be putting in an extra 20 hours then they could be doing it even better. There’s always more than can be achieved. So if you distracted in other area you can’t give 100%*

*I’m sure that a few of them are non-execs as well.*

*When I say full time, I’m imagining that you can do an MPs role 9 to 5 and still have capacity to do some non-execs, figurehead type things for companies. I would think that is entirely feasible.*

*I think it is just a conflict of interest. It’s a conflict of your time and you are paid to represent your community and how can you do that if you have a side-line representing yourself?*

*It doesn’t matter what they get paid it’s the time they dedicate to it.....I would feel a bit let down if they were doing all these extra things ....because their time is not being invested where it should be.*

*A lot of them get paid big consultancy fees for these big companies. I’m not actually sure what that means but to me that means BUNG.*

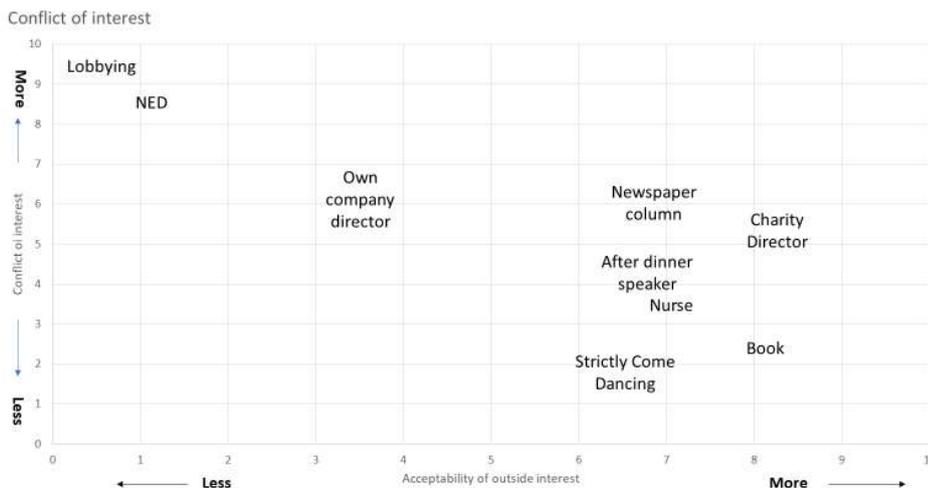
*It should be declared and in many ways, I think it should disqualify them from getting involved in certain lines of being an MP.*

people did – imply that answers were all over the grid. Indeed, in some cases even suggesting that these mean scores are reasonable approximations of answers is something of an analytical liberty.

Where consistency is apparent though, is in relation to both NEDs and lobbying. Confirmation that both outside interests cross the acceptability line and are thought to be outright conflicts of interest was easily forthcoming. Both are believed to be low on acceptability and high on conflict of interest, as their position in the top left hand corner of the grid below implies.

*Is there nothing higher than 10 for lobbying?*

*Or they are influencing, a conflict of interest. They have to be whiter than white.*



Other occupational outside interests sewed confusion and doubt. For some, writing a newspaper column was a conflict but acceptable, while nursing presented no conflict but was unacceptable because it would require much time spent outside parliament. Others considered there to be a moral or societal good associated with some roles - such as entertaining people on Strictly Come Dancing or working for a charity – but were a conflict because either would take MPs away from parliament.

*If it's in their own time it's up to them.*

There is probably little value in trying to discern a collective logic from this exercise, but one takeaway is probably important: in allocating the levels of acceptability, participants (perhaps sub-consciously) moved away from the previously held position that any conflict meant an outside interest was off-limits. For example, the idea that an MP cannot remain a director of a business that they set up prior to entering parliament suddenly seemed a little unfair. Indeed, roles without an obvious conflict of interest can be considered acceptable so long as the time taken to undertake them is outside of parliamentary hours, or better yet - if there's a positive outcome for society rather than the MP, the acceptability level rises accordingly.

*Say like the director, it would be hard to give that up, I don't think you should have to. If you are really dedicated to that you should not have to.*

*It is all about who is benefitting. Is it society or the MP who is benefitting? That's how I split the acceptable side.*

Having moved beyond an uncomplicatedly single-minded approach to acceptability, consideration then moved on to the potential benefits of having outside interests, or at least to salary-related issues that underpin the discussion of the subject.

*There is this notion that politicians are out of touch with reality and yet when they plant themselves in reality they get kicked up the bum for that. It is a no-win situation.*

Having concluded that parliament suffers from career-minded politicians, whose views of 'regular' life were thought to have been warped by the Westminster bubble, for a few participants the prospect of picking up experience through outside

*Having outside interests and getting involved in something outside the House of Commons*

interests was seem to be helpful to the professional development of MPs. Further, the need to generate additional income was suddenly linked to the idea that MPs live a certain kind of life, with associated expectations that are unlikely to be met through a basic MP salary. This, of course, was anathema to those who viewed £75k per year as a large income, but it did encourage more accepting mindsets over financial remuneration. This was particularly the case when set in context of equivalent occupations, where income levels were thought to be materially higher. The case of secondary headteachers was made as one example, with leadership positions in the corporate world also alluded to as significantly higher paying but not necessarily having greater levels of responsibility.

But it would be wrong to say that a more informed discussion unleashes laissez-faire attitudes from which MPs materially benefit. In actual fact the leash is still very much in place, just loosened a little.

### Reasonable limits

The way the term 'reasonable limits' was received is somewhat defined by the pre-existing mindset people have on MP remuneration and behaviour. For those whose views of MPs border on the sympathetic, a more descriptive and straight-laced response featured strongly. Among those for whom frustration with our elected representatives is more prevalent, reasonable limits is more defined as a tolerance mechanism for bad behaviour, or simply a prime example of system failure that allows MPs to take advantage.

There are also two alternative lines on why an explicit reasonable limits policy needs to exist. While being the majority view, there is some surprise that such a policy is not already firmly codified as set of rules to abide by - almost a contract of employment for MPs. Indeed, parallel lines were drawn with more commercial settings, where employees are prevented from taking second roles, are subject to time management and performance assessment, and would face likely dismissal if they committed an act detrimental to company policy or reputation. This is a strong theme that emerges from the groups – likening the role of MP to another occupational role was almost an automatic assumption, and few see why MPs should not have to play by the same rules that everyone else does.

However, this is somewhat countered by a 'common-sense' reaction – that few people need to be told what is inappropriate for an employee of a company to take on, and that jobs would be lost if they broke the rules. This sense of bewilderment that MPs are not similarly endowed with such common sense contributes to wider frustrations with MPs.

In the case of both focus groups, use of 'time' was considered to be the primary way in which reasonable limits should be applied in practice. This thinking again reverted to personal occupational roles – like them, MPs are paid to do a specific job and they should perform within 'contracted' hours. This did open up the possibility of outside interests being acceptable 'after hours' or in MPs own free time so long as they have put in the requisite shift on the day job. In some ways, this demonstrated more than anything that views on outside interests had softened during the course of the groups – manifestation of the idea that extracurricular work *could also* be done in addition to standard functions of being an MP.

*could make them better MPs because they get more experience of life, pick up more knowledge, skills that they would not necessarily get as MPs.*

*I'd be in support of an increase in MPs salary as I can understand why they do pursue all these outside interests. If they were in a corporate company they would be paid a lot more for less responsibility.*

*You are able to take part but it is capped basically. There is only so much you can take from that – rules and guidelines.*

*What we let them get away with.*

*I would ultimately be staggered if there wasn't some form of guidance to them on what they can and can't do in their role.*

*This is what we have to do and they are representing the voting public and at a certain level they are having the same accountability that we have in our jobs. They are out of touch and that is what it feels like. They make their own rules.*

*Quite a lot of employment contracts actually don't allow people to take another job...or it has to be with the permission of the employer. Why should that not apply to a member of parliament?*

*I didn't have to be told that. I knew that and these people are much better educated than me. Surely they should have a bit of common sense.*

*If they spend a few hours spare at the end of the week then fine, but not spend two hours as an MP...*

Money is a secondary factor in determining reasonable limits, but only in the sense of earning it - not necessarily in the sense of *how* it is earned. It has already been established that any money earned via lobbying or corporate endeavour that risks some conflict of interest would cross a line for most people (and there does also remain a small core of people for whom any kind of additional earning goes against the principle of being dedicated to the job). Yet in other contexts, and so long as additional income is made in MPs' own time, some latitude is on display.

The question of 'permission' is perhaps one worth some consideration. In line with points made about contractual obligations with their own employer, participants suggested that any outside interest needed to receive a stamp of approval, which in this case would be from the parliamentary authorities or an independent body. However, the reputation of any oversight body itself was held in some disrepute, given long-lasting reputational damage from the expenses scandal. The question of 'who watches the watcher' is of some relevance, for the impression is embedded that there is complicit acceptance that MPs could (and maybe still can) take advantage of the system however they please.

## Transparency

There is the perception of a systematic culture at Westminster in which those not 'on the take' tolerate or acquiesce with those who are. The roots of this suspicion lead directly to the expenses crisis, but on-going reports of personal failures on the part of individual MPs reinforce the impression. This implies that not only is there a lack of trust in MPs to claim the right level of expenses or comply with reasonable limits expectations, but there is an expectation that such things would continue to be waived through by the authorities – especially if reasonable limits retain some vagueness in definition and implementation.

The latter is something of significance. The perceived problem of reasonable limits is that there might be some subjectivity about what is reasonable and what is not, and where there is no absolute black and white policy to comply with, (human nature being what it is) ways to game the system will be found or rules inconsistently applied therein undermining the purpose of the protocol.

In this context the need for absolute transparency was seen as obvious but may still be insufficient to deal with the kinds of concerns alluded to in the groups. However, few doubt that full transparency is absolute must if the reasonable limits policy is to have value in the collective eye of the public. Indeed, not only that - the call from some participants was for full transparency to extend to matters beyond reasonable limits, with evidence placed in the public domain on MPs voting record, attendance in Parliament, perhaps even timesheet hours 'clocked in' (like they have in their own occupations) in addition to register of interest entries.

In many ways, the call from group participants amounted to a need for a full code of conduct for MPs (Erskine May not being something that made it into discussion), covering all issues that might present themselves in the course of an MPs time at Westminster. Some said they would be interested in accessing such information. The strength of feeling about MPs and their conduct is so strong that any mechanism that might help restore trust could be only considered a positive development, particularly if such information were updated and available at election time for voters to make a fully informed vote choice.

*If they've done a few other things on the side as long as it has not clearly benefitted them over and above the electorate as a whole I would not have a problem.*

*I don't see a problem where let's say once a month an MP sits on a board meeting as a non-exec director and advises on legislation.*

*I think this reasonable limits is airy-fairy because who is going to regulate this in the same way who regulates their expenses...? This is not going to be regulated and this is not going to be transparent even if there is reasonable limits.*

*Was it Jeremy Hunt that had seven flats he'd just purchased in Southampton that had slipped is mind? We've all been there. It's easily done.*

*The image of MPs is not good. They seem to have lost the public's trust, people's respect. We would not be having these conversations...we'd be saying yeah if they think they can take on another job and still do their own job we'd be happy for them to do that.*

*I feel there is too much of a grey area, there's too much doubt in it. It's either they can.... spend as much time doing extra things as they like, or they can't. When you have a big grey area in the middle....I think people just take advantage.*

*You could look into so and so MP attended x% of sessions, owns interests in these companies – I don't see why we can't do that.*

*Through transparency yes, absolutely. It's a deterrent. If you know it's recorded and out there for the public if they want it, the chances are you're not going to abuse it.*

The call for full transparency then, should be taken for granted as a requirement from the public that is unconditional – even if many of those calling for it have no intention of ever really looking up information placed on the register. That is not the point – what matters is that a check is placed on the culture at Westminster, allowing those who might have a need to call elected representatives to account.

*Why can't you have an independent body that determines within pre-set parameters what would be acceptable? Yeah, a code of conduct.*

With all of that said, it remains the case that these focus groups moved from positions of intransigence to one where high expectations of MP performance are demanded, but compensated with allowance for reasonable limits on outside interests so long as – as one so well put it in rather unparliamentary terms – MPs just don't take the piss.

*You know it's hard because every person wants to see the good in it and the bad in it. Everybody wants to see them doing a fantastic job, everybody wants them not to be doing extra stuff that is going to benefit other people down the line. Eventually if you did want to do charity work, all well and good; if you're getting paid for said charity work, not so well and good. If you want to be a spokesman for a company, fine; if you're benefitting from it personally, not good. It's ok to a certain degree, but just don't take the piss.*

*But I think we all agree that we need transparency. We don't trust the information that currently we have at our disposal. We don't trust that it is the full picture.*