

All correspondence between IPSA and members of the public and media concerning the European Research Group in the last two years.

Email 1

Dear Sir/Madam

In the light of recent press speculation about the European Research Group (ERG) and its funding, is this potentially an issue that ipsa can examine?

The speculation is that a number of Conservative MPs claim expenses for money they provide to ERG for research purposes. I am concerned that these payments to ERG are possibly an abuse of the Parliamentary expenses regime and therefore to ensure taxpayers money is being spent responsibly, some reassurances are required.

If ERG is being funded by taxpayers especially as it is a single issue organisation and would be of little use to a Conservative MP who doesn't support their views I feel very uncomfortable.

I would welcome your advice in this matter.

Thank you and kind regards.

[name redacted]

Email 2

From: [name redacted]
Received: 08/09/2017 09:07
To: <Enquiry>
Subject: The European Research Group and MPs Expenses

Dear Sir/Madam,

You may be aware of the use of taxpayers' money to fund the Conservative group the ERG. Conservative MPs who are members of this "party within a party" have been claiming large amounts of expenses for "research" which has been used to fund this branch of the Conservative party. This is in clear breach of Chapter Three of the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses. As a political, single issue group the ERG is clearly a political party and MPs expenses cannot, under the rules, be used to fund it.

I would therefore request that you launch an urgent investigation into the misuse of the expenses scheme by those MPs in question and take whatever action necessary to ensure that the money is repaid to the taxpayer.

Yours sincerely,

[name redacted]

Email 3

From: [name redacted]

Received: 08/09/2017 10:55

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: European Research Group

Given the reports appearing in various media channels recently about the above group and in particular how it's funded I urge you to conduct an urgent investigation into whether some MPs are using their expenses claims to make donations.

This is highly irregular and should cease immediately.

[name redacted]

Email 4

From: [name redacted]

Received: 08/09/2017 11:53

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: Funding of the European Research Group

Dear Sir/Madam

I refer to press reports in recent days that what appears to be a party political lobby group is being funded via Parliamentary allowances. I have looked at the information on the IPSA site and cannot locate any detailed information on this group.

While I understand the commonsense of pooling resources I don't think the intention of the allowance scheme was that it fund a party political lobby group with it's own membership and office bearers.

Can you confirm that the funding of this group via the Parliamentary allowance scheme is permissible? If it is what are the reporting requirements and where can the public access details, regarding the funding & membership, of this & any other groups funded in the same way?

Yours sincerely

[name redacted]

Email 5

From: [name redacted]

Received: 08/09/2017 21:36

To: <FOI>

Subject: European Research Group

Dear Ipsa,

I would like to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act:

1. The total amount paid to the European Research Group for each of the last three years;
2. The names of each MP whose expenses go to the European Research Group and the amount attributed to each one for each of the last three years,
3. All reports into spending by the European Research Group,
4. The salary and pension contributions paid to Christopher Howarth out of these expenses and his employment contract,
5. All correspondence between Ipsa and Christopher Howarth,
6. All accounts and itemised spending made by the European Research Group in each of the last three years,
7. All information held on Christopher Howarth,
8. All examples of research done for the European Research Group held by IPSA.

Kind regards

[name redacted]

Email 6

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your query.

The ERG is one of a number of pooled services which MPs can claim for from IPSA under *The Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses* (section 7.4b). We regularly review the work of all the pooled services and have carried out assurance reviews which has included the ERG.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Received: 09/09/2017 02:17

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: European Research Group.

Dear IPSA,

I am concerned by reports over the amount of taxpayer's money being put into this so called "European Research Group" by MP's in their expenses claims.

It seems to me to be a very long way from being proper, and while I won't be in the least surprised to find it is "within the rules", I suggest that it is likely to be an abuse of the public's trust.

I trust you are investigating. Are you able to comment?

Best wishes,

[name redacted]

Email 7

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email, reference CAS-104915, regarding the European Research Group (ERG).

We published details of all claims made by MPs on our website.

To view claims made by MPs for ERG subscriptions, you will need to download the claim data for 2016-17, which you can do at the following address: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>.

Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year (2016-17) alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for 'ERG' to identify relevant claims.

This will provide you with the names of all MPs who have made claims for subscriptions to the ERG in each financial year, alongside the total amount paid.

I hope this helps. If you need any further assistance, please do let me know.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Received: 30/01/2018 19:42

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: European Research Group

Can you please supply the names of MP's that are currently members and those that have been members of the European Research Group in the last year.

Can you also supply details of the expenses that each of these Ministers have received in relation to the European Research Group.

Thank you in anticipation.

[name redacted]

Email 8

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email.

Under the terms of the [Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses](#) ('the Scheme'), MPs can claim the costs of payments for pooled staffing services, which provide research, briefing and drafting services to groups of MPs on parliamentary-related matters. There are currently five such services which are registered with IPSA: the Parliamentary Research Service (for Labour MPs); the Policy Research Unit (for Conservative MPs); the Scottish National Party Research Team (for SNP MPs); the Parliamentary Support Team (for Liberal Democrat MPs) and the European Research Group, which provides briefings to Conservative MPs on issues relating to the UK's relationship with the European Union.

Pooled services are widely used by MPs, and can provide significant economies of scale. Research is completed by small teams of researchers at pooled service organisations, and made available to all subscribing MPs. This enables MPs to deploy more of their staffing resources in other areas of work. MPs and their staff are provided with a number of services, including:

- detailed background research and briefings on political, economic, and governmental affairs;
- template correspondence that can be used by MPs to respond to constituents who have contacted their MP with the same or similar queries;
- materials (such as suggested parliamentary questions) for use in debates in the House of Commons or in Westminster Hall; and
- information on the passage of legislation through parliament.

The work conducted by these groups must be *parliamentary* in nature in order to qualify for reimbursement.

Details of all claims made by MPs are [published on our website](#). To view claims made by MPs for ERG subscriptions, please visit: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for 'ERG' to identify relevant claims.

As part of our core regulatory function, and to assure both ourselves and the public that public funds claimed are in accordance with the Scheme's rules, we conduct regular assurance reviews on different areas of spending, including that related to pooled staffing services. We last conducted such a review in 2016, during which we examined all expenditure claimed by MPs relating to such services, reviewed the governance and operations of each service and scrutinised examples of output material. Our report on the 2016 [can be found on our website at this link](#), and contains details on each service's structure, operations and funding.

I hope this helps. If you have any further queries please do let me know.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Received: 21/02/2018 17:24
To: <Enquiry>
Subject: European Research Group

Hi IPSA

My MP Timothy Loughton belongs to a group called European Research Group. On investigating this group it appears that he pays a membership fee which he then claims back against expenses. The tax payer is therefore indirectly funding this organisation. As a tax payer I object to my money being used to pay the subscriptions of a very wealthy group of MPs.

I work with adults with learning disabilities, our team have just been told that due to austerity five members of staff need to be made redundant to meet savings targets. It appears that we can spend money supporting millionaire MPs, yet cannot fund service for vulnerable people.

I would complain to my MP, but Tim is unlikely to be interested.

[name redacted]

Email 9

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email. In August 2016 we published we published an assurance review of pooled services, including the ERG. This was most recently updated in June 2017.

You can view this report [here](#). It provides more information about the ERG and its compliance with IPSA regulations.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Received: 03/03/2018 16:44

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: European Research Group

Dear Madam/Sir,

If I understand correctly, ERG is in part taxpayer-funded. Does IPSA have any information about the sort of research ERG is conducting in the form of research papers etc. I have not been able to find any such information from Wikipedia so would be very grateful for info on this point.

Best regards,

[name redacted]

Email 10

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email. Under the *MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses*, MPs can use their staffing budget to pay for “pooled staffing services, which provide research, briefing and drafting services to groups of MPs, and have an arrangement with IPSA in place” (7.4b). The European Research Group are one such pooled staffing service, and as such the MP can claim for their services.

For your reference, the current version of the *Scheme* can be found here:

<http://www.theipsa.org.uk/media/184560/scheme-2017-18-version-41-post-8-june-election.pdf>

If you have any questions about this then don't hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Received: 21/09/2017 22:21

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: European research Group

Hello,

I wonder if you could clarify how MP's are able to fund this organisation (The European Research Group) through their expenses, despite this being forbidden under the expenses rules?

Krishnan Guru - Murphy brought this issue to my attention on the 7th Sept '17 (Channel 4News) interview with an interview with MP Suella Fernandes, who was very evasive as to who their tax funded members were.

I have still been unable to find out who these publicly funded people are or if they exist.

Yours sincerely

[name redacted]

Email 11

From: [name redacted]

Sent: 01 January 2018 16:31

To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>

Subject: RE: Freedom of Information request - FOI request - European Research Group [CAS-99449]

Thank-you for your recent email.

I understand that it is possible that IPSA will hold communications referring to the European Research Group in a number of different forms, including but not limited to:

- Communications between IPSA MP Support team and MPs (and their staff) regarding claims for ERG services;
- Communication exchanged with members of the public regarding the ERG;
- Communication between IPSA Business Administration team and the ERG regarding the payment of such claims;
- Communications between IPSA Policy team and the ERG regarding regular assurance reviews; and
- Internal communications regarding any of the above.

In light of this, I would like to request, under the FOI Act, the following from 01 January 2017 to the present day:

- Communications between IPSA MP Support team and MPs (and their staff) regarding claims for ERG services;
- Communications between IPSA Policy team and the ERG regarding regular assurance reviews

I define communications as including (but not limited to) the following:

- Emails
- Letters
- Invoices
- Memos
- Briefings
- Research documents
- Press clippings
- Invitations
- Presentation slides
- Notes taken during telephone conversations

Email 12

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email, reference CAS-104918, regarding the European Research Group (ERG). Under the terms of the [Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses](#) ('the Scheme'), MPs can claim the costs of payments for pooled staffing services, which provide research, briefing and drafting services to groups of MPs. There are currently five such services which are registered with IPSA:

- the Parliamentary Research Service (for Labour MPs);
- the Policy Research Unit (for Conservative MPs);
- the Scottish National Party Research Team (for SNP MPs);
- the Parliamentary Support Team (for Liberal Democrat MPs) and
- the European Research Group, which provides briefings to Conservative MPs on issues relating to the UK's relationship with the European Union.

We published details of all claims made by MPs [on our website](#). To view claims made by MPs for ERG subscriptions, you will need to download the claim data for 2016-17, which you can do at the following address: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>.

Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year (2016-17) alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for 'ERG' to identify relevant claims.

This will provide you with the names of all MPs who have made claims for subscriptions to the ERG in each financial year, alongside the total amount paid.

I hope this helps. If you need any further assistance, please do let me know.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Received: 30/01/2018 19:28

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: FW: European Research Group

Can you please send me a list of MP's who are in the ERG?

Thanks

[name redacted]

Email 13

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email regarding the European Research Group (ERG).

Under the terms of the [Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses](#) ('the Scheme'), MPs can claim the costs of payments for pooled staffing services, which provide research, briefing and drafting services to groups of MPs. There are currently five such services which are registered with IPSA:

1. the Parliamentary Research Service (for Labour MPs);
2. the Policy Research Unit (for Conservative MPs);
3. the Scottish National Party Research Team (for SNP MPs);
4. the Parliamentary Support Team (for Liberal Democrat MPs) and
5. the European Research Group, which provides briefings to Conservative MPs on issues relating to the UK's relationship with the European Union.

Details of all claims made by MPs are [published on our website](#). To view claims made by MPs for ERG subscriptions, please visit: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for 'ERG' to identify relevant claims. This will provide you with the names of all MPs who have made claims for subscriptions to the ERG in each financial year, alongside the total amount paid.

As part of our core regulatory function, and to assure both ourselves and the public that public funds claimed are in accordance with the Scheme's rules, we conduct regular assurance reviews on different areas of spending, including that related to pooled staffing services. We last conducted such a review in 2016, during which we examined all expenditure claimed by MPs relating to such services, reviewed the governance and operations of each service and scrutinised examples of output material. You can find a full copy of our review of pooled services, including the ERG, on our website at the following address: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/assurance-reports/>. The report concluded that the materials provided the service were an eligible cost under the terms of the Scheme.

If you believe that a claim made by an MP is in breach of the *Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses*, you can make a complaint to the Compliance Officer for IPSA. Further information about the Compliance Officer, including contact details, can be found at: www.parliamentarycompliance.org.uk

Kind regards,
[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Received: 09/02/2018 09:34

To: <Enquiry>; Speaker's Office

Subject: Re: European Research Group - MPs interests supported by Taxpayers money

Good day

I refer to my earlier email, to which no response has been received, regarding the European Research Group and the misuse of public funds by MPs using their expenses to fund essentially an internal organisation to support their own aims. BuzzFeed News has now identified a full list of MPs who are abusing their expenses to fund this internal club for self interest.

The details are as follows and shows 70 MPs "playing fast and loose" with the expenses system and effectively stealing Taxpayers money. That some of the MPs are Cabinet ministers shows the extent to which the approval of such theft has reached in government. The MPs are as follows and can be followed up via BuzzFeed.

Richard Bacon
Kemi Badenoch
Crispin Blunt
Peter Bone
Andrew Bowie
Ben Bradley
Andrew Bridgen
Bill Cash
Maria Caulfield
Christopher Chope
Simon Clarke
James Cleverly
Geoffrey Clifton-Brown
Robert Courts
Philip Davies
Leo Docherty
Nadine Dorries
Steve Double
James Duddridge
Iain Duncan Smith
Charlie Elphicke
Michael Fabricant
Mark Francois
Marcus Fysh
Chris Green
Gordon Henderson
Kevin Hollinrake
Adam Holloway
Ranil Jayawardena
Bernard Jenkin
Andrea Jenkyns
Caroline Johnson
Gareth Johnson
David Jones
Julian Knight
Pauline Latham
Andrew Lewer
Julia Lopez
Tim Loughton
Craig Mackinlay
Rachel Maclean
Anne Main
Scott Mann

Mark Menzies
Nigel Mills
Damien Moore
Anne-Marie Morris
Sheryll Murray
Owen Paterson
John Penrose
Tom Pursglove
Jeremy Quin
John Redwood
Jacob Rees-Mogg
Paul Scully
Bob Seely
Henry Smith
Royston Smith
Desmond Swayne
Ross Thomson
Michael Tomlinson
Craig Tracey
Anne-Marie Trevelyan
Martin Vickers
Theresa Villiers
John Whittingdale
Bill Wiggin
Mike Wood
William Wragg

This doesn't of course mean this is the limit to funding of this group via taxpayers money. However, it needs investigating and the funds need to be repaid from MPs personal funds not those of the taxpayer via the expenses system which tantamounts to theft.

Best regards

On 7 February 2018 at 10:57, [name redacted] wrote:

Dear Sir,

I am extremely concerned that it seems that a closed group of MPs are using Taxpayers money, drawn via the MPs expenses system to fund an internal research organisation. This appears to be an entirely self serving organisation where the following MPs, doubtless there are others:

- + Andrew Leadsome GBP 10000
- + Jacob Rees-Mogg GBP10,000
- + Suella Fernandez (?)
- + Steve Baker (?)
- + Sajid Javid - GBP8000
- + Liam Fox - GBP 8000
- + Chris Grayling - GBP 2000

Since this is clearly, not a mere subscription to the Economist, it would appear that these MPs are using public funds to support their own pet interests. If the work requested and paid for as a subscription by these MPs is to be funded by the Taxpayer then why is it that the data is not in the public domain.

This particular group do not appear to have any wider accreditation so this looks like a "con" or "scam" to allow MPs to get the taxpayer to fund an organisation that serves their particular aims.

As such this means these MPs are stealing from the public purse and misrepresenting expenses. Presumably MPs cannot claim memberships of "Whites" as genuine expenses that the taxpayer is expected to pay for therefore we should not be paying for the ERG.

Thank you to look into this matter and likewise advise the MPs involved or what appears to be misuse of public funds.

With kind regards

[name redacted]

Email 14

To whom it may concern,

How do I check how much MPs, and which ones, are claiming to fund the European Research Group on the IPSA web site?

Regards

[name redacted]

Email 15

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 26 February 2018 10:33
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: Re: FOI request: European Research Group materials

Hi [name redacted],

Thanks for your prompt response to my recent request.

I would be grateful if you could initiate an internal review of this decision. ERG reports provided to IPSA for the purposes of preparing its assurance report would presumably represent a small proportion of its overall output. I argue that any negative impact on the ERG's commercial interests would be negligible and is therefore outweighed by the public interest in publication.

Best wishes,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

On Fri, Feb 23, 2018 at 2:40 PM, FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk> wrote:
Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email, reference CAS-106718.

We received a similar request in October 2017 for '*all examples of research done for the European Research Group held by IPSA*'. In our response, [which can be viewed here](#), this information was withheld from disclosure under [section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act](#) (FOIA). This exemption relates to information which, if disclosed, would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person.

Materials are produced by the ERG for paying subscribers, and the commercial viability of the organisation relies upon these paid subscriptions. Disclosure of this material would directly prejudice the commercial interests of the ERG (as the content can only otherwise be obtained via a paid subscription), and as such the information is exempt from disclosure under the terms of the FOIA.

However, you can view a copy of our assurance report on pooled staffing services, which includes our review of the ERG materials, which is available on our website at the following address:
<http://www.theipsa.org.uk/publications/assurance-reports/>.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 22 February 2018 16:54
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: FOI request: European Research Group materials

Good afternoon,

Please provide copies of all materials provided to IPSA by the European Research Group in relation to the following IPSA report:

Assurance Review: Pooled Services - Assessment of risks, controls and compliance, 2015-16

Please include all materials provided in relation to the report update in June 2017.

Best wishes,

[name redacted]

Email 16

Dear [name redacted],

You can find information claims for the European Research Group by visiting this link: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Then, to the top right of the page select which financial year you wish to view and select the 'Type' as 'Individual Claims'. You can then download this and open in excel. You can then filter the details column by 'ERG Subscription' or try other related details.

Kind regards,
[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Received: 21/02/2018 21:51
To: <Enquiry>
Subject: Funding of European Research Group

To whom it may concern,

How do I check how much MPs, and which ones, are claiming to fund the European Research Group on the IPSA web site?

Regards

[name redacted]

Email 17

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for contacting IPSA. The ERG is one of a number of pooled services which MPs can claim for from IPSA under the [Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses](#) (section 7.4b). IPSA recently conducted an assurance review of the pooled services used by MPs, which you can find at this website address: http://www.theipsa.org.uk/media/184678/pooled-services-assurance-report_final.pdf

I hope you will find this report helpful in providing more information about the ERG.

Regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Received: 21/03/2018 09:13

To: <Enquiry>

Subject: european research group

Jacob rees mogg said to channel 4 news that you could find info on the group - I searched on European research group and got nothing - so, where is it situated please?

[name redacted]

Email 18

Dear [name redacted]

Thank you for your email address. When IPSA has communicated with the European Research Group, we have done so via an individual staff member, and unfortunately I am not able to share that contact without the individual's permission.

Sorry I cannot be of further assistance.

Kind regards
[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Received: 29/03/2018 19:01
To: <Enquiry>
Subject: European Research Group Contact

Sir,

I would be grateful if you could assist.

I am member of a Group with Brexit concerns. We contact figures/organisations and seek Brexit information and clarifications, and make our views known.

We wish to contact the *European Research Group* [ERG]. I understand ERG provide briefings to Conservative MPs on issues of UK-EU relationships, and is one of five groups which provide MPs such services so registered with the IPSA. However, while aware the Rt Hon Jacob Reese-Mogg MP is ERG Chairman, I can find no ERG contact address. I happily accept the fault is mine. But that does not help.

I am aware the IPSA addressed queries regarding ERG funding. It may be that due to this, and as ERG is IPSA registered, you have an ERG contact email address.

Of course it may be you directly contact the staff of the individual ERG MPs, can release no, or have no, or there is no, such contact address. If you have one I would be grateful if you could forward it to me. If for any reason you cannot do so, please inform me as there remains the option of a solution from Mr. Reese-Mogg.

I do thank you and remain

[name redacted]

Email 19

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your call just now.

I've just spoken with my colleague who handles all the pooled services stuff.

In terms of claims for pooled staffing services, including the ERG, our Scheme says: "Where IPSA has an agreed arrangement in place, it can pay annual subscriptions for pooled staffing services direct to the relevant organisations who provide such services. These organisations send direct payment request forms to their users annually." In short, any MP who wants to subscribe to one of the pooled services signs up directly with the pooled service (usually at the beginning of the financial year). They usually sign a form confirming that they wish to subscribe, and that they are happy for the subscription fees to be deducted from their staffing or office costs budget. The pooled services in turn then provide us with the names of all the subscribing MPs and copies of the signed forms so that we can allocate the costs to their individual budgets. We then publish this as a claim on our website.

So in terms of what we hold relating to each claim, we hold a signed form for each subscribing MP. I've attached a blank copy of what that form looks like (from a couple of years ago) – you're very welcome to request all the completed forms if you'd like, but the only additional thing they'd tell you is the names of the MPs, which we publish anyway. There's also an invoice from the ERG itself (which accompanies the signed forms).

In terms of the number of MPs who claim the fees to receive the research briefings, page 13 of our assurance report shows the annual totals. Our published data shows 25 MPs subscribed in 2016-17 and 18 MPs in 2017-18.

Also – in case of interest – we responded to another FOI last week in which we disclosed some correspondence that we have exchanged with the ERG. I've attached our written response and the correspondence in question.

I hope all of this helps, and please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: FOI
Sent: 12 September 2018 13:13
To: [name redacted]
Subject: RE: FOI Request

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email, reference CAS-123421.

Under the terms of the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses ('the Scheme'), MPs can claim the costs of payments for pooled staffing services, which provide research, briefing and drafting

services to groups of MPs on parliamentary-related matters. There are currently five such services which are registered with IPSA: the Parliamentary Research Service (for Labour MPs); the Policy Research Unit (for Conservative MPs); the Scottish National Party Research Team (for SNP MPs); the Parliamentary Support Team (for Liberal Democrat MPs) and the European Research Group, which provides briefings to Conservative MPs on issues relating to the UK's relationship with the European Union.

Pooled services are widely used by MPs, and can provide significant economies of scale. Research is completed by small teams of researchers at pooled service organisations, and made available to all subscribing MPs. This enables MPs to deploy more of their staffing resources in other areas of work. MPs and their staff are provided with a number of services, including:

- detailed background research and briefings on political, economic, and governmental affairs;
- template correspondence that can be used by MPs to respond to constituents who have contacted their MP with the same or similar queries;
- materials (such as suggested parliamentary questions) for use in debates in the House of Commons or in Westminster Hall; and
- information on the passage of legislation through parliament.

The work conducted by these groups must be parliamentary in nature in order to qualify for reimbursement.

Details of all claims made by MPs are published on our website. To view claims made by MPs for ERG subscriptions, please visit: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for 'ERG' to identify relevant claims, which includes the individual amount and the date claimed.

As part of our core regulatory function, and to assure both ourselves and the public that public funds claimed are in accordance with the Scheme's rules, we conduct regular assurance reviews on different areas of spending, including that related to pooled staffing services. We last conducted such a review in 2016, during which we examined all expenditure claimed by MPs relating to such services, reviewed the governance and operations of each service and scrutinised examples of output material. Our report on the 2016 can be found on our website at this link, and contains details on each service's structure, operations and funding – including that relating to the ERG. This provides information on how the subscription fees are spent.

I hope this helps. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 12 September 2018 12:40
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: FOI Request

To Whom It May Concern

Under the Freedom of Information Act, I am requesting the following information:

In the 2017-18 financial year, there were 18 MPs who in total claimed £36,000 for European Research Group (ERG) subscriptions.

- (1) Could you please provide a breakdown of how this money was spent, as well as the sum claimed each of the individual 18 members. Please provide as much detail as possible.
- (2) The dates on which applications for this funding were made.

If the above requests have not exceeded the cost threshold for FOIs, please could you also provide a list of pooled research groups similar to the ERG.

If you have any queries please don't hesitate to contact me via email or phone and I will be happy to clarify what I am asking for, my details are outlined below.

Yours faithfully

[name redacted]

Email 20

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email of 13 August 2018, reference CAS-121536.

Details of all claims made by MPs are [published on our website](#). To view claims made by MPs for ERG subscriptions, please visit: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for 'ERG' to identify relevant claims.

This will provide you with the names of all MPs who have claimed subscription costs, along with the subscription amount.

I hope this helps. Please do let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 13 August 2018 14:28
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: European Research Group subscriptions

To whom it may concern,

I am seeking the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Name: [name redacted]

Email: [name redacted]

Description: A full list of all current Members of the House of Commons who have declared subscriptions to the European Research Group as a Parliamentary expense in the last 12 months.

Thanks,

[name redacted]

Email 21

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email, reference CAS-113788.

Under the terms of the [Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses](#) ('the Scheme'), MPs can claim the costs of payments for pooled staffing services, which provide research, briefing and drafting services to groups of MPs on parliamentary-related matters. There are currently five such services which are registered with IPSA: the Parliamentary Research Service (for Labour MPs); the Policy Research Unit (for Conservative MPs); the Scottish National Party Research Team (for SNP MPs); the Parliamentary Support Team (for Liberal Democrat MPs) and the European Research Group, which provides briefings to Conservative MPs on issues relating to the UK's relationship with the European Union.

Pooled services are widely used by MPs, and can provide significant economies of scale. Research is completed by small teams of researchers at pooled service organisations, and made available to all subscribing MPs. This enables MPs to deploy more of their staffing resources in other areas of work. MPs and their staff are provided with a number of services, including:

- detailed background research and briefings on political, economic, and governmental affairs;
- template correspondence that can be used by MPs to respond to constituents who have contacted their MP with the same or similar queries;
- materials (such as suggested parliamentary questions) for use in debates in the House of Commons or in Westminster Hall; and
- information on the passage of legislation through parliament.

The work conducted by these groups must be *parliamentary* in nature in order to qualify for reimbursement.

Details of all claims made by MPs are [published on our website](#). To view claims made by MPs for ERG subscriptions, please visit: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for 'ERG' to identify relevant claims.

As part of our core regulatory function, and to assure both ourselves and the public that public funds claimed are in accordance with the Scheme's rules, we conduct regular assurance reviews on different areas of spending, including that related to pooled staffing services. We last conducted such a review in 2016, during which we examined all expenditure claimed by MPs relating to such services, reviewed the governance and operations of each service and scrutinised examples of output material. Our report on the 2016 [can be found on our website at this link](#), and contains details on each service's structure, operations and funding.

We do not hold copies of the ERG's internal funding arrangements; I believe that as an unincorporated associated they are not required to produce annual accounts.

I hope this helps. If you have any further queries please do let me know.

Kind regards,
[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Sent: 02 May 2018 14:30

To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>

Subject: FOI - ERG funding

Dear Sir/Madam,

- Your full name (title, first name, surname) - [name redacted]
- An address for response (postal or email) - [name redacted]
- A full description of the information required - I am seeking information on how the ERG (European Research Group) is funded, how much is public money, from where are the public funds drawn, how the money is spent, and how the public accounts for this expenditure are shown and reported?

Kind regards

[name redacted]

Email 22

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email.

We don't have any remit regulating the staffing arrangements of pooled services and so have not reviewed this job vacancy advert.

Kind regards,
[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 19 April 2018 22:28
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: Re: Pooled Service Job Advertisement

Thanks.

Please will you confirm whether anyone from IPSA has reviewed the content of the ERG advert linked below and if so whether any determination was made as to political content.

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

----- Original Message -----

On Friday, April 13, 2018, 12:33 pm, FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk> wrote:

Hi [name redacted],

Thank you for your email.

My previous email probably answers this but just to confirm, we don't have any remit regulating the staffing arrangements of pooled services and so don't hold any information regarding their recruitment; unlike staff employed by MPs, staff working for pooled services are not directly paid by us and are not therefore required to use IPSA job descriptions or conform with the Scheme.

Our area of concern is with the *output* of the pooled services, the costs of which are claimed by MPs through us.

I hope that provides clarification. Please do let me know if you have any further information.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 10 April 2018 22:56

To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>

Subject: Pooled Service Job Advertisement

Under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act please supply the following information in relation to the linked job advert.

1. When did IPSA first become aware of the vacancy?
2. Did IPSA review the job specification at the time of publication?
3. What determination was made to ensure that the job as described is within the scope of the scheme?
4. Do you have examples of vacancies at other pooled service organisations?

[name redacted]

Email 23

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email.

We are responsible for administering the payroll for staff directly employed by MPs, but we do not hold information on external staffing services which may provide support to MPs outside of the payroll.

Please let me know if you have any further queries.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]

Sent: 05 May 2017 15:59

To: FOI

Subject: Re: ERG finances and membership - FOI request

Thanks, You have costs related to MP staff but not pooled services?

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

----- Original Message -----

On Friday, May 5, 2017, 3:27 pm, FOI <FOI@parliamentarystandards.org.uk> wrote:

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email, reference CAS-80617.

Under the [Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses](#), MPs can claim the costs of 'pooled staffing services', which provide research, briefing and drafting services to groups of MPs. The cost of these services can be claimed from an MP's staffing budget. The European Research Group is one of these services. MPs who engage these services can either pay the annual subscription themselves and then claim reimbursement, or they can arrange for IPSA to make direct payments to the relevant organisations on their behalf.

We do not hold any information relating to the operation or governance of these organisations, and as such I'm afraid we do not hold any of the information that you have requested.

If you have any further queries, please do let me know.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

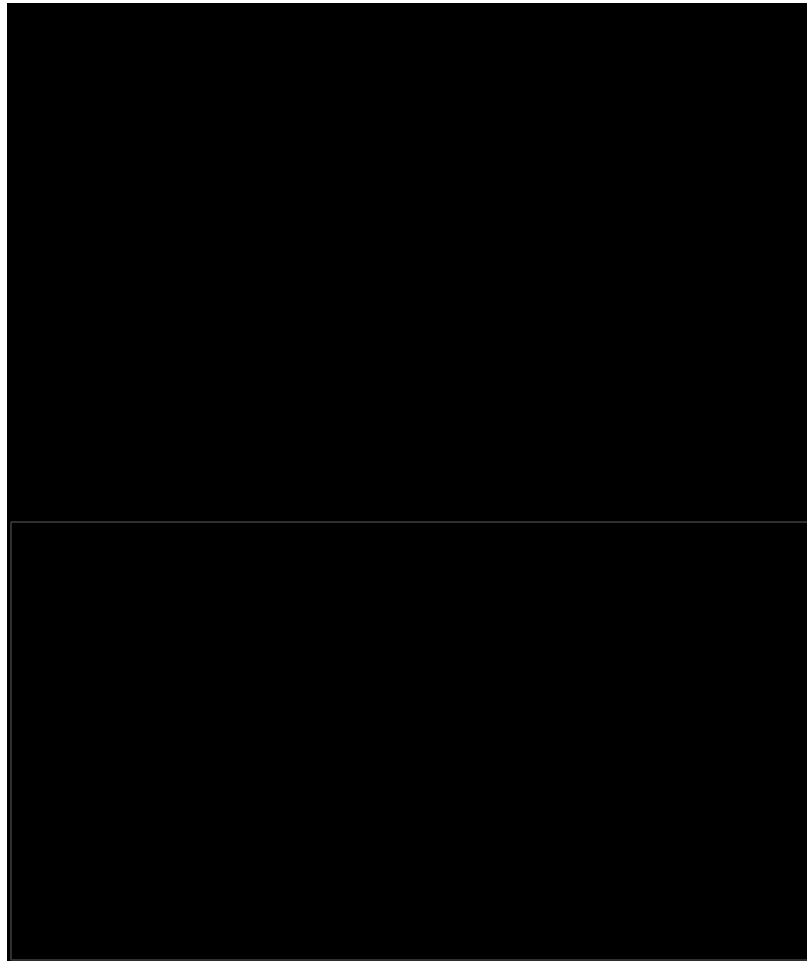
From: [name redacted]

Sent: 23 April 2017 21:53

To: FOI

Subject: ERG finances and membership - FOI request

I have read with interest reports of a grouping called the European Research Group. They have a Senior Researcher. The post was advertised a few years back. Here is a copy of the advert. [w4mp | The site for everyone working for an MP](#)



w4mp | The site for everyone working for an MP

This is a Freedom of Information Request for the following information.

For the years 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016:

- A) who were the officers of this group
- B) which staff were employed and if available what were salaries and benefits were paid
- C) How was this group funded - source of any subscriptions or donations please

Thanks for the attention,

Any response by email is fine but for reference my full contact details are as follows:

[name redacted]

Email 24

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 14 September 2018 17:31
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: FOI request

Dear IPSA,

I would like to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act:

All correspondence, (including notes of conversations) between the Daily Mail and IPSA and Open Democracy and IPSA in September 2018 concerning the European Research Group.

As this is a matter of current importance I would be grateful if you could treat this request as urgent and reply as soon as the information is at hand.

Kind regards

[name redacted]

Email 25

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your email, reference CAS-107705.

The only information that we hold on the funding sources of pooled services is where they have provided it to us as part of our assurance review(s). Where such information was provided, it was reported in the [published document](#) (eg. para 35 refers to the split in funding sources of the Parliamentary Support Team). We do not hold any other information on their funding.

The services are under no obligation to report such information to us and do so voluntarily. We have no legal remit regulating the organisational structure of these organisations; the eligibility of the materials they produce for MPs who claim their services are our primary focus.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 06 March 2018 06:01
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: 180305 FOI Request

Dear [name redacted],

Under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act please provide to me, by email, the ratio of IPSA funding to external non-IPSA funding for each of the IPSA-funded pooled services:

1. Parliamentary Support Team.
2. Parliamentary Research Service.
3. Policy Research Unit.
4. European Research Group.
5. Scottish National Party Research Team.

In addition, in each case, please identify the proportion of non-IPSA funding for which the ultimate controlling party is offshore.

Please provide the information for the periods 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16 & 2016/17.

Yours faithfully,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

On 2 Mar 2018, at 12:28, FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk> wrote:
Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your emails of 28 February, reference CAS-107365.

The information that we hold relating to pooled staffing services is the names of those who claim payments for subscriptions. Details of all claims made by MPs, including those for payments for pooled staffing services, are [published on our website](#). To view claims made by MPs for pooled staffing services, please visit: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for the name of the service to identify relevant claims.

As part of our core regulatory function, and to assure both ourselves and the public that public funds claimed are in accordance with the Scheme's rules, we conduct regular assurance reviews on different areas of spending, including that related to pooled staffing services. We last conducted such a review in 2016, during which we examined all expenditure claimed by MPs relating to such services, reviewed the governance and operations of each service and scrutinised examples of output material. Our report on the 2016 [can be found on our website at this link](#), and contains details on each service's structure, operations and funding. Those services which are unincorporated associations are not required to produce annual accounts; for those which are limited companies, you can find their full accounts via Companies House: <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/>.

I hope this helps.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 28 February 2018 10:03
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: 18022801 FOI Request

Dear Sir/Madam,

Under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act please provide to me, by email, lists of the individual members, i.e. those personally responsible for any contractual obligations, of the IPSA-funded pooled services:

1. Parliamentary Support Team.
2. Parliamentary Research Service.
3. Policy Research Unit.
4. European Research Group.
5. Scottish National Party Research Team.

Please provide the information for the periods 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16 & 2016/17.

Yours faithfully,

[name redacted]

Email 26

Dear [name redacted],

That's right, we don't hold any information about the controlling interests (if any) of the pooled services.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 02 March 2018 13:26
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: Re: 18022801 FOI Request

Dear [name redacted],

Many thanks for you speedy response.

Can you therefore confirm that you do not hold information as to the controlling interests of IPSA funded pooled services other than that available at Companies House?

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

On 2 March 2018 at 12:28, FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk> wrote:

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your emails of 28 February, reference CAS-107365.

The information that we hold relating to pooled staffing services is the names of those who claim payments for subscriptions. Details of all claims made by MPs, including those for payments for pooled staffing services, are [published on our website](#). To view claims made by MPs for pooled staffing services, please visit: <http://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-costs/other-published-data/>. Using the drop-down menu at the top of the page, you will need to select a financial year alongside the option for 'individual claims', which will open a spreadsheet containing all individual claims made that financial year. You can filter on either the 'Details' or 'Short Description' columns for the name of the service to identify relevant claims.

As part of our core regulatory function, and to assure both ourselves and the public that public funds claimed are in accordance with the Scheme's rules, we conduct regular assurance reviews on different areas of spending, including that related to pooled staffing services. We last conducted such a review in 2016, during which we examined all expenditure claimed by MPs relating to such services, reviewed the governance and operations of each service and scrutinised examples of

output material. Our report on the 2016 [can be found on our website at this link](#), and contains details on each service's structure, operations and funding. Those services which are unincorporated associations are not required to produce annual accounts; for those which are limited companies, you can find their full accounts via Companies House: <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/>.

I hope this helps.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 28 February 2018 10:03
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: 18022801 FOI Request

Dear Sir/Madam,

Under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act please provide to me, by email, lists of the individual members, i.e. those personally responsible for any contractual obligations, of the IPSA-funded pooled services:

1. Parliamentary Support Team.
2. Parliamentary Research Service.
3. Policy Research Unit.
4. European Research Group.
5. Scottish National Party Research Team.

Please provide the information for the periods 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16 & 2016/17.

Yours faithfully,

[name redacted]

Email 27

Dear [name redacted],

Thank you for your emails of 28 February, reference CAS-107369. I'll take each of your queries in turn.

[...]

Evidence of the decision-making process to allow or disallow activities with respect to the European Research Group

As part of our core regulatory function, and to assure both ourselves and the public that public funds claimed are in accordance with the Scheme's rules, we conduct regular assurance reviews on different areas of spending, including that related to pooled staffing services. We last conducted such a review in 2016, during which we examined all expenditure claimed by MPs relating to such services, reviewed the governance and operations of each service and scrutinised examples of output material. Our report on the 2016 [can be found on our website at this link](#), and contains details on each service's structure, operations and funding – as well as our assessment of whether the materials provided by the pooled services comply with the Scheme.

[...]

I hope this helps. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Kind regards,

[name redacted]

----- Original Message -----

From: [name redacted]
Sent: 28 February 2018 11:11
To: FOI <FOI@theipsa.org.uk>
Subject: 180228A FOI Request

Dear Sir/Madam,

Under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, having regard to The Scheme of MP's Business Costs and Expenses 2017-2018 published here:

<https://www.theipsa.org.uk/media/1608/9-mps-scheme-of-business-costs-and-expenses-2017-18.pdf>

please provide to me, by email, evidence of the decision-making process to allow or disallow activities under Clause 3.5e with respect to the **European Research Group**.

Please confirm the existence of this information. Please provide the information to me.

Many thanks,

[name redacted]