



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

Paper 15/17

21 November 2016

NIAR 427-16

Neil Sedgewick

Opposition funding

1 Introduction

This briefing note will examine the different approaches and amounts provided in respect of financial assistance given to opposition parties across jurisdictions in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.

2 House of Commons

Short Money (introduced in 1975) is made available to all opposition parties in the House of Commons that secured either two seats or one seat and more than 150,000 votes at the previous General Election¹. Short Money is not available to parties whose Members have not sworn the oath.

The scheme has three components:

¹ <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN01663>

- Funding to assist an opposition party in carrying out its Parliamentary business.
- Funding for the opposition parties' travel and associated expenses.
- Funding for the running costs of the Leader of the Opposition's office.

On 21 March 2016, a motion was tabled to reduce the Short Money entitlements of opposition parties; to provide that future increases be linked to the Consumer Prices Index, rather than the Retail Prices Index; to introduce floors and ceilings on the amounts of Short Money that could be claimed by parties with up to five Members of Parliament; and to require political parties in receipt of Short Money to provide further details of how that money is spent.

The amounts available to parties from the first two components are calculated, as follows –

- General funding for Opposition Parties – the amount payable to qualifying parties (as of 1 April 2015) is **£16,956.16** for every seat won at the last election plus **£33.86** for every 200 votes gained by the party.
- Travel Expenses for Opposition Parties – the total amount payable under this component (as of 1 April 2015) is **£186,269.37** apportioned between each of the Opposition parties in the same proportion as the amount given to each of them under the basic scheme set out above.

The third component is provided at a flat rate.

- Leader of the Opposition's Office – under the third component of the scheme **£789,979.10** is available for the running costs of Leader of the Opposition's office for the financial year commencing on 1 April 2015.

A similar scheme, referred to as Cranborne money, was agreed on 27 November 1996. This provides financial assistance for opposition parties, in the House of Lords.

The scheme makes provision for general election years to be split into pre-election and post-election periods in order to accommodate changes of Government etc.

2. The Scottish Parliament

Section 97 of the Scotland Act 1998 provides for an Order in Council to allow the SPCB to provide assistance for opposition parties² by making payments to registered political parties in the Parliament “for the purpose of assisting members of the Parliament who are connected with such parties to perform their Parliamentary duties.”

The Members’ Expenses Scheme defines ‘parliamentary duties’ as follows:

"parliamentary duties" means any task or function which a member could reasonably be expected to carry out in that member's capacity as a member, including but not limited to:-

(a) attending a meeting of the Parliament;

(b) attending a meeting of a committee or sub-committee of the Parliament on which the member sits or which the member is required to attend, or attending such a meeting for some other valid reason relating only to the business of the committee or subcommittee;

(c) undertaking research or administrative functions which relate directly to, or are in connection with, the business of the Parliament;

(d) attending meetings for the purpose of representing electors or explaining the application of policy or meeting a member of the public residing in the constituency or region from which that member was returned;

(e) attending parliamentary party group meetings in Edinburgh or, with the prior approval of the SPCB, any other place in Scotland;

(f) attending a meeting, ceremony or official function which relates directly to, or is in connection with, the business of the Parliament;

(g) attending an international conference which relates directly to, or is in connection with, the business of the Parliament with the prior approval of the SPCB; but does not include a member's activities which are in relation to that member's role as a party spokesperson or representative;

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga>

To be eligible, a party may have no more Ministers or Junior Ministers than one fifth of the total number of Ministers and Junior Ministers within the Scottish Government. An eligible party is entitled to an annual sum based on the number of members of the Parliament who are connected to the party, and the Assistance Order makes **provision for annual up-rating of this sum.**

Figure 1: Definition of ‘connected’ in relation to funding for non-Executive parties in the Scottish Parliament³

<p>A registered political party and a member of the Parliament are to be regarded at any time as connected if the member of the Parliament–</p> <p>(a) was returned at the previous general election after contesting it as a candidate (whether for return as a constituency member or as a regional member) of that party;</p> <p>(b) was returned since that general election at an election held under section 9 of the Act (constituency vacancies) after contesting it as a candidate of that party; or</p> <p>(c) was included in the regional list for any region submitted by that party for that general election and as such became a member of the Parliament since that general election by virtue of a notification under section 10 of the Act (regional vacancies).</p>

Financial Assistance to Non-Government Parties: 2014-15

The table shows the amounts eligible parties actually claimed in the period 2014-15. The annual entitlement per member was **£7,781.71**

Eligible party	Members	Total Eligible Amount	Amounts claimed
Scottish Labour Party	38	295,704.98	295,704.98
Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party	15	116,725.65	116,725.56
Scottish Liberal Democrats	5	38,908.55	38,626.19
Scottish Green Party	2	15,563.42	15,467.89
Total	60	466,902.60	466,524.62

Payments are only made for expenses incurred and claims must include a breakdown of what is being claimed and a statement that the expenses have been claimed were incurred

³ The Scottish Parliament (Assistance for Registered Political Parties) Order 1999:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/1999/1745/article/1/made>

by the Party exclusively for the purpose of assisting Members of the Parliament who are connected with the Party to perform their Parliamentary duties. A certificate must be provided to the Parliament by an independent professional auditor annually.

3. National Assembly for Wales

Section 24 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 places a duty on the Assembly Commission (following approval by the Assembly) to make payments to political groups to assist Members belonging to those groups to perform their functions as Assembly Members.

Currently, groups of three or more Members are entitled to an allowance to assist them in the discharge of their Assembly work – the allowance is usually known as the Party Leaders' Allowance. The latest Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances³⁴ (May 2016) provides a breakdown of the amounts available to Members.

The Leader of a Political Group not in Government is entitled to an additional office holder's salary which is calculated as follows: a base salary of **£13,000** plus an additional **£1,000** for every Member of the group up to a maximum of **£36,000**.

The Determination also specifies that any Political Party not represented in the Welsh Government, with three or more Members, is entitled to a core administration allowance of **£50,000**.

Following the allocation of core administration allowances, the remaining Political Party Support Allowance is allocated on a per capita basis among all Members whose parties are not represented in the Welsh Government.

4. Dail Eireann

According to the Standards in Public Office Commission⁵:

⁴ [http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/./Determination on Members Pay and Allowances - May 2016.pdf](http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/./Determination%20on%20Members%20Pay%20and%20Allowances%20-%20May%202016.pdf)

⁵ [http://www.sjpo.gov.ie/en/About-Us/Our-Policies/FOI-Manuals/Combined-Section-15-16-Manual/Party-Leaders Allowance-Act.html](http://www.sjpo.gov.ie/en/About-Us/Our-Policies/FOI-Manuals/Combined-Section-15-16-Manual/Party-Leaders-Allowance-Act.html)

The Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act 2001 ("the Party Leaders Allowance Act") provides for the payment of an annual allowance to the parliamentary leader of a "qualifying party" in relation to expenses arising from the parliamentary activities, including research, of the party. The allowance, which is referred to as the Party Leaders Allowance, is paid by the Department of Finance. The Standards Commission has a supervisory role in relation to spending of the allowance.

A "qualifying party" is defined in the Party Leaders Allowance Act as a political party registered in the Register of Political Parties which contested the last general election or any subsequent by-elections and which had at least one member elected to Dáil Éireann or elected or nominated to Seanad Éireann at that general election or at any subsequent by-election.

The allowance is calculated for each parliamentary leader by reference to the party's representation in Dáil and Seanad Éireann. If a qualifying party forms part of the Government, the combined allowances in respect of its members of the Dáil, only, is reduced by one-third.

The Party Leaders Allowance Act provides for an allowance of €48,547 per member for each of the first ten members of a qualifying party elected to Dáil Éireann, €38,837 per member for each member from 11 to 30 members, and €19,423 for each member over 30 members.

The Party Leaders Allowance Act provides for an allowance of €31,743 per member for each of the first five members elected or nominated to Seanad Éireann, and €15,872 for every member thereafter.

The Party Leaders Allowance Act provides for an allowance of €27,934 for non-party members of the Dáil and an allowance of €15,872 for non-party members of the Seanad. Non-party members of the Dáil and Seanad are not required to make returns to the Standards Commission accounting for their expenditure of the allowance and the Standards Commission has no role in relation to the monitoring of such expenditure.