



on Sales

## **First AGM**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Professional Sales Monday 11 June, 2018 7pm**

Committee room 7, Palace of Westminster

#### **Present:**

Stephen Kerr MP, chairman; SK  
Martyn Day MP, vice-chairman; MD  
Mark Pawsey MP, treasurer; MP

Andy Hough, co-CEO, APS; AH  
Ben Turner, co-CEO, APS; BT  
Guy Lloyd, parliamentary liaison, APS; GL  
Mike Hurley, sales ambassador, APS; MH  
Graham Smith, relationship director, APS; GS  
Jenny Booth, media & PR, APS. JB

#### **Discussion on the purpose of the APPG on (Professional) Sales**

The purpose of the group was confirmed: To improve recognition by parliament and industry of the importance of sales, and the impact it has on the UK economy; to promote and advance sales as a profession; to boost the success of British industry, especially in international trade.

The APPG will focus on Business to Business (B2B) selling, but will also be aware of and address the needs of Business to Consumer (B2C) sales. It was noted that much of the High Street retail sector is struggling.

#### **Andy Hough explained the APS's three focus areas in working with the APPG.**

These were:

1. APS-led apprenticeships to foster high quality sales skills across the UK workforce.
2. Transforming sales into a recognized profession.
3. Improving sales skills in SMEs.

AH said the APS's work on sales apprenticeships and schools outreach via Sales In A Box, fitted with focus 1 and needs to be promoted into schools. More universities needed to be encouraged to offer the APS's level 6 degree apprenticeship.

For focus area 2, he suggested asking Crown Procurement to request that sales people they meet with are professionally registered. He observed that the government's procurement frameworks were heavily slanted towards price. APS/APPG to start a conversation about why buying on value was better than buying solely on price, and recommend a value framework for procurement that would mean public sector projects working better, with less risk and improved through life costs. The framework today makes it very difficult to win if you are not the lowest price bidder.

For focus area 3, AH said SMEs were unaware they can apply for funding from the apprenticeships levy to up-skill their salespeople. Better sales skills meant SMEs could improve their revenue, and make themselves more attractive to lenders/investors so their businesses could grow.

Mike Hurley (MH) said that, re focus items 1 and 3, the Department for International Trade offered no guidance to UK businesses on sales techniques for selling abroad. It was suggested that an inquiry into helping SMEs into export markets would be useful.



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**Stephen Kerr (SK) gave detailed advice on the smooth-running of APPGs.**

They need a high quality, proactive secretariat, to provide discussion topics and administrative functions. Best run by the group's main partner organisation outside of parliament.

Held up the secretariat of APPG for Religious Freedom or Belief as a model of good practice:

- circulates a weekly email via MailChimp to MPs, peers and supporters
- maintains and updates website: includes articles and opinion pieces, social media feed, lists of members and supporters and partner organisations, and links to topic briefings
- has built up a database of written/video briefings on key topics and verticals
- keeps a list of supportive MPs, their key interests and businesses based in their constituencies
- monitors parliamentary business for anything with relevance: the smartphone app called House Papers publishes parliamentary papers up to two weeks in advance – a great way to see what is coming up.
- offers briefings to MPs when a relevant topic crops up in parliament.
- encourages MPs to ask departmental oral questions, to speak in Commons debates, and to request Westminster Hall debates/backbench debates/adjournment debates/EDMs.

**SK stated the best APPGs are modelled on select committees:**

- hold regular inquiries on topics of interest
- keep inquiries short (eg two hearings each lasting 1hr) so time-poor MPs feel willing to attend
- choose/frame topics in a “sexy” way likely to attract the interest of MPs and media
- invite high profile industry figures and persons of interest to give evidence
- publish reports of those inquiries on APPG for Professional Sales's website
- reports also to be printed in the form of a booklet eg 20 pages long
- hold launch events for those reports, inviting a minister to give a welcoming speech
- circulate copies of the report to MPs and also to wider sales industry
- contact supportive MPs suggesting a range of written questions they could submit and debates they could request, based on the report.
- run a drop-in clinic to discuss the results from an inquiry.

SK recommended that APS delegates attend a select committee in person to see how they run.

**SK, Martyn Day MP and Mark Pawsey MP made suggestions how to raise profile of the APPG:**

Debates: 60 MPs have registered interest in the APPG on Sales, including senior figures. If 6-12 MPs would agree to speak in a debate, then a minister would have to respond, and civil servants would have to draft his speech. SK: “That is how to get attention in this place.”

Martyn Day (MD): If a minister gave an ill-informed speech, then supportive MPs could demand a further written statement, keeping topic alive and generating more publicity.

Contacts with government: SK said there were three main English governmental departments for APPG to influence: BEIS, International Trade, and Education; also some crossover with Digital remit of Dept for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. He recommended that when the APS met civil service it was best to have an MP present. Mark Pawsey (MP) said that to “really move the dial”, get SK to book a meeting with a minister, who would then bring his civil servants who would have to research/prepare.

Effective inquiries: MP said inquiries must be kept short (eg two sessions of one hour) as MPs will struggle to give more time to them.



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SK said inquiries needed to be set up with report conclusions already in mind: “You can almost write report in advance.” Choose a good day and time to hold hearings.

SK recommended targeting MPs with a particular business interest in their constituency.

MP stressed need not to assume knowledge in MPs: and importance of attracting high profile, interesting people to give evidence eg Karren Brady. He suggested that site visits could be popular and help to raise profile (eg Sellafield).

Schedule: space approx 5 inquiries out over parliamentary year (roughly one every 6 weeks), with approx 4 MPs to hear evidence. MP: “Too many and people switch off, too few and they forget.” Suggested APS consider inquiries as a potential APS marketing and recruitment tool. Invite target corporates to attend launch events for APPG inquiry reports.

Media contact: MD suggested sending a press release with APPG inquiry recommendations to trade, business and general media, to generate coverage and increase awareness.

Events/launches: MPs hosting celebrations at Commons for successful Level 6 sales apprentices. In future, perhaps a reception at No 10 to celebrate role of sales in UK economy.

**Potential inquiry topics:** MP said an element of controversy would attract more interest eg Carillion collapse, mis-selling, unethical sales behaviour. Warned against being broad and “woolly”.

Suggested looking at whether salespeople were born or made, routes into sales. Guidance on best way into profession. Ethics in sales a good topic. Also how to equip SMEs to trade abroad (see MH comments above).

AH suggested that schools and colleges should do more to equip youngsters with skills/mindset for commerce. Warned that skills were being driven out of sales: the bad driving out the good.

This made for bad deals, when procurement professionals able to run rings round unskilled salesperson. SK agreed. MP suggested inviting head of Crown Procurement to give evidence.

Ben Turner (BT) said sales should be taught in business degrees, but wasn't.

AH suggested the need to buy on value, not solely on price.

MH suggested the wave of bankruptcies in the retail sector, which he said was set to increase.

## Implementation

AH said that the APS would start building a website for the APPG on Sales by June 22. A range of domain names would be registered.

SK suggested setting up a WhatsApp group to keep APPG officers and members and APS officers in touch. Guy Lloyd (GL) to create the WhatsApp group.

Jenny Booth and Adam Harding should monitor the House Papers app, which lists parliamentary business two weeks in advance. SK said debates on Trade Bill, due to go through parliament in September, were a good opportunity for speeches on sales.

SK would be happy if the new website had the same, professional design as the APS site. He said that the APS should have a free hand editorially to put what it wanted on website: “There's nothing you can say in that space that would cut across MPs.” He suggested lots of communication (bulletins, opinion pieces, briefings to MPs), and stressed importance of keeping in touch with the press. “It becomes a pulpit for us to broadcast what we want about the future of the profession, what the government should be planning and what SMEs should be doing.”

MP said that most APPGs did not have a bank account or a budget. Exception was when they had a commercial sponsor.

SK and AH said they needed to finalise draft of APPG's mission statement.

MPs already committed to APPG are mainly Conservative, SNP and Lib Dem, but not Labour. AH and BT suggested recruiting Toby Perkins, Labour MP for Chesterfield, who used to have a business selling sports clothing and who supported the SLA, pre-APS.

GL suggested asking APS members and corporates to contact their own local MPs and ask them to join APPG. AH suggested Andrew Selous, for Whitbread connection.



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Meeting end.