



## **I'm concerned about the political activities of a charity, what are the rules?**

Charities are free to participate in public debates on policy and legislation and to use their voice and their influence to try and bring about decisions which will support the work of the charity. However, charities must guard their independence and cannot allow political activity to become their reason for existing.

Political activity is defined in charity law as any activity that aims to promote a change in the law or Government policy. Charities can undertake political activity in support of their charitable aims, but it is not acceptable for a charity to pursue its aims through political activities. Whether or not charities choose to undertake political activity, they must never support a particular political party or endorse a particular political candidate.

## **A constituent has complained about a charity's campaign which uses controversial material in its promotions, what are the rules?**

Charities sometimes use emotive and controversial material to highlight a particular issue or campaign. They are free to do this as long as the material used is backed up with evidence and is factually accurate. The Commission cannot usually take up complaints about controversial or upsetting material a charity uses in its campaigns. We advise anyone who is concerned about material a charity is using to contact the charity directly with their complaint or, where appropriate, the Advertising Standards Authority.

## **How much of a charity's resources can be spent on campaigning?**

Charities are free to devote most, or all, of their resources to non-political campaigning in furtherance of their aims and purposes. Although trustees have a great deal of autonomy in how they allocate funds and resources, any campaigning carried out by a charity must promote the aims and purposes laid out in the charity's governing document. However, although a charity may engage in political campaigning, it must ensure that political campaigning does not become its reason for existing and engagement in such activity is reviewed at regular intervals. Political activity must support the aims and objectives of the charity, it cannot be the sole activity of the charity or the way that the charity carries out its purposes.

## **Can charities campaign in foreign countries?**

Campaigning to change the policies or laws of a foreign government cannot be a charity's reason for existing or the way in which it pursues its aims. However, as with charities operating within England and Wales, charities may seek to promote changes in the law in foreign countries provided it is in support of their aims and purposes, by removing obstacles to the achievement of the charity's purposes, or by facilitating the achievement of those purposes.

## **Can I speak on behalf of a charity?**

Yes. MPs and politicians can speak on behalf of charities and can advocate a charity's perspective on policy and legislation. We advise charities which enlist the support of politicians to be conscious of the importance of their independence, and to seek where possible cross party representation in order to maintain their political neutrality. The Charity Commission would be concerned if a particular charity consistently enlisted the support of politicians from one political party only.

## **Can I use a charity's premises to hold political meetings?**

In order to raise funds local charities of all sorts may permit non-charitable organisations to use their premises on proper commercial terms; this could include politicians holding meetings or MPs holding surgeries. In addition, trustees of certain charities (notably schools) may be required to allow election candidates to use the premises of their charities for the holding of election meetings, free of charge, under the Representation of the People act 1983.