

POLITICAL FUND BRIEFING NUMBER 2: Question and Answer document

Q1. Why have a Political Fund and why now?

A. Since 2000 Trade Unions and other civil society organisations have been defined as “Non-party campaigners” under the legislation that governs elections in the UK as regulated by the Electoral Commission. Changes made by Part II of the Lobbying Act 2014 have significantly increased the likelihood that for the first time the Society will be required to register and report expenditure to the Electoral Commission if our long-established campaigning is not to be curtailed during what are known as “regulated periods” in the run-up to specific UK elections and referendums. Members at the 2015 Annual Delegates’ Conference (ADC) foresaw the potential challenge to the Society’s lawful campaigning activity that any registration with the Electoral Commission without a political fund in place could generate. Future briefings will discuss these issues in more detail, including the impact of some of the key provisions of the current Trade Union Bill if passed unamended.

Q2. Does this mean the Union will be affiliating to the Labour Party?

A. No. The 2014 ADC considered the question of affiliation to the Labour Party and overwhelmingly rejected it. At the same time the ADC also overwhelmingly endorsed a policy of political independence from any party. The rules of the political fund will be written to reflect this making it clear that the money cannot be used for affiliation to any political party.

Q3. What will the money be used for?

A. The legislation governing political funds deliberately uses the term “political” but the fund should be viewed as a campaign fund. It will be used to ensure that any campaigns prioritised by the ADC and or by UK Council will not be suspended during regulated periods.

Q4. Why do members have to be balloted on this?

A. The 1992 Trade Unions and Labour Relations Consolidation Act require this. A political fund can only be set up by a Trade Union following a ballot of all members.

Q5. What are the rules governing this ballot?

A. If a majority of members who vote say yes then we have legal authority to set up a political fund. Although there is no minimum turnout required by law we obviously want as many members to vote as possible so that the result is representative of the views of members. At present legislation requires this ballot has to be repeated every 10 years if a political fund is established to ensure members still support the decision.

Q6. When will I be able to vote?

A. The exact timetable is still being finalised but we expect it to be early next year.

Q7. If the ballot returns a yes vote and a political fund is set up do I have to pay into it?

A. No. The new Trade Union Bill, expected to become law in 2016, requires members to individually opt in to paying the political fund. You are therefore fully entitled to vote yes for the union to set up a fund but as an individual decide not to opt in to paying into the fund.

Q8. How much will it cost?

A. 60p per quarter (that is £2.40 per annum) will be paid into the political fund but only for those who opt in to paying this additional amount. Those who choose not to opt in will not pay this additional 60p contribution. We hope that all members will vote yes to establish the fund and pay into it. However, once the fund is established deciding to pay into it is an individual decision and separate from the decision to establish a fund.

Q.9 Will this put my SoR membership subscription up?

A. Subscriptions are determined annually by UK Council but there are no plans to increase subscription rates purely as a result of establishing a political fund. The payment into the fund will be separate from your SCoR contributions and will only be paid by those members who opt into paying into the political fund.

Q.10 Is the ballot taking place across all countries in the UK?

A. Yes. There will be one ballot for all members in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Although separate legislation applies in Northern Ireland we have sought advice from the Northern Ireland Certification Officer which confirms we are no longer required to hold a separate ballot there.

Q11. How does this affect the College of Radiographers?

A. The College is a charity governed by a Board of Trustees and regulated by charity law. The trustees are receiving their own legal advice about the implications for the charity and will make a decision in accordance with the advice. Compliance with charity law is, however, a matter for the trustees of the College and will not require a separate ballot of all members.

Q.12 Will further information be available?

A. Yes this is number two of five briefings that will be sent to all members in the run up to the ballot. Further briefings will go into more detail about why we need a political fund, what it will be used for and how the opt in arrangements will work. Detailed information will also be available on the website.

Where possible regional reps meetings will be held to discuss the ballot and regional briefings will also be encouraged. All members will also receive a detailed email setting out the reasons for the ballot and the importance of participating. So look out for the briefings and check the website regularly.

Q.13 Will there be publicity material to publicise the ballot?

A. Yes we are planning a series of posters and leaflets that will be distributed in due course.