

Situations and procedures – GB

# Permissibility checks for political parties

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This document is for party officers in Great Britain, with a good understanding of donations and loans, who want to know more about how to check permissibility.

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## Terms and expressions we use

We use '**must**' when we refer to a specific legal or regulatory requirement. We use '**should**' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal requirements.

You do not have to follow this guidance, but if you do, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

## Our approach to enforcement

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. You can find more information about the Commission's approach to enforcement at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement).

# Permissibility checks for political parties

## Who this document is for:

Party officers in Great Britain who want to know more about how to check if a donor or lender is permissible.

## This covers:

- Who is a permissible donor or lender
- How to make checks on permissibility
- What you need to record

## Related documents:

- [Overview of donations to political parties](#)
- [Overview of loans to political parties](#)
- [Situations and procedures – Managing donations to political parties](#)
- [Situations and procedures – Reporting donations and loans: Parties with accounting units](#)

## Expert papers

- [Donations from trusts](#)

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## Summary

Donations and loans to political parties are regulated by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA).

They can only be accepted from certain sources, mainly UK-based.

This guidance explains how to check if you can accept a donation or loan from a particular source, and tells you the information you need to record.

The information you record will help you complete your quarterly returns to us.

## Checking permissibility

Before a party accepts any donation or loan of more than £500, it must take all reasonable steps to:

- make sure it knows the identity of the true source
- check that the source is permissible

### Who is responsible for checking permissibility?

Parties must appoint and register a treasurer with us. The registered treasurer is legally responsible for making sure that the party complies with the rules.

This includes maintaining suitable systems within the party to ensure that donations and loans are dealt with correctly.

Other party officers must give relevant information to the treasurer if reasonably required to do so.

### How long do I have to check permissibility?

As soon as you receive a donation, you must make sure you know who the donor is, and start checking their permissibility. You have 30 days to decide whether to accept or refuse the donation.

You must complete permissibility checks on lenders before entering into a loan.

Even if you have made a check in connection with an earlier donation or loan from the same source, you must make a fresh check in each new case to make sure nothing has changed.

You should keep a record of all your permissibility checks to show that you have followed the rules.

For more information, see these documents:

- [Introduction to being a party treasurer](#)
- [Overview of loans to political parties](#)
- [Overview of donations to political parties](#)
- [Managing donations to political parties](#)

#### Important

If it is not completely clear who you should treat as the donor, you should check the facts to make sure.

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## What is a permissible source?

A permissible source is:

- An individual registered on a UK electoral register, including overseas electors and those leaving bequests.
- A UK-registered company which is incorporated within the European Union (EU) and carries on business in the UK.
- A Great Britain registered political party.
- A UK-registered trade union.
- A UK-registered building society.
- A UK-registered limited liability partnership (LLP) that carries on business in the UK.
- A UK-registered friendly society.
- A UK-based unincorporated association that is based in and carries on business or other activities in the UK.

You can also accept donations, but not loans, from certain types of trust, certain public funds and anyone who is paying for the reasonable costs of an overseas visit.

Charities are not allowed to make political donations under charity law, even if they fall into one of the categories of permissible donor.

If you know that a donor is a charity, you should make sure that they get advice from the Charity Commission before giving a donation.

For more information, see this document:

- [Expert paper: Donations from trusts](#)

## How to check if an individual is permissible

### What makes an individual permissible?

Individuals must be on a UK electoral register at the time of the donation or loan. This includes overseas electors.

If you are left a bequest, and the individual was on the electoral register at anytime five years before their death, you can accept the donation.

### How do you check permissibility?

You can use the electoral register to check if an individual is permissible. Parties are entitled to a free copy of the full electoral register.

A new version of the electoral register is usually published on 1 December every year, and it is updated regularly.

You should contact the Electoral Registration Officer at the relevant local council for your copy, explaining that you are asking for it as a registered political party. You should also ask them to send you all the updates.

You must check the register and updates carefully to make sure that the person is on the register on the date you enter into the loan, or on which you received the donation.

In special circumstances, people have an anonymous registration. If a donor or lender is anonymously registered, please contact us for advice on how to confirm permissibility.

You must only use the register for checking if a donor or lender is permissible, or for electoral purposes. You must not pass it on to anyone else.



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## What do you need to record?

You must record:

- The full name of the donor or lender.
- The address as it is shown on the electoral register, or if the person is an overseas elector, their home address

You may find it helpful to note the person's electoral number, as a record of your check.

## How to check if a company is permissible

### What makes a company a permissible donor?

A company is permissible if it is:

- registered as a company at Companies House
- incorporated in a Member State of the EU, and
- carrying on business in the UK

You must be sure that the company meets all three criteria.

### How do I check company registration and EU incorporation?

You should check the register at Companies House, using the free Webcheck service at [www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk).

You should look at the full register entry for the company.

To check that the company is permissible, you need to look at its registered number. Some companies will have a number only. Other companies have a letter as a prefix to the number.

The table below shows you if a company with a particular prefix is permissible, as long as it is also carrying on business in the UK.

Use Companies House free Webcheck service at:  
[www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk)

Prefix letter	Is it permissible?
None	Yes
NI, SC	Yes
FC, NF, SF	Yes, if 'country of origin' on the register entry is an EU Member State
OC3, SO3	Yes, as a limited liability partnership – see separate section below
IP, SP, NP	Maybe – see industrial and provident societies in the 'Other types of donor' section on page 10
Any other prefix	No

## How do you check if the company is carrying on business in the UK?

You must be satisfied that the company is carrying on business in the UK. The business can be non-profit-making.

Even if you have direct personal knowledge of the company, you should check the Companies House register to see if:

- The company is in liquidation, dormant, or about to be struck off.
- The company's accounts and annual return are overdue.

A company may still be carrying on business if it is in liquidation, dormant or late in filing documents, but you should make extra checks to satisfy yourself that this is the case.

For any company, you should consider looking at:

- The company's website.
- Relevant trade, telephone directories or reputable websites.
- The latest accounts filed at Companies House.

If you are still not sure if the company is carrying on business in the UK, you should ask for written confirmation of its business activities from the company's directors.

If you're still uncertain that a company is permissible, please call or email us for advice.

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## What do you need to record?

You must record:

- The name as it is shown on the register
- The company's registered office address
- The registered company number

## Limited liability partnerships

### What makes a limited liability partnership a permissible donor?

A limited liability partnership (LLP) is a permissible donor if it is:

- Registered as an LLP at Companies House.
- Carrying on business in the UK.

### How do you check permissibility?

You should check the register at Companies House, using the free Webcheck service at [www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk).

You need to look at the LLP's registered number. Only numbers beginning with OC3 or SO3 are permissible LLPs.

You can find more information in the previous section 'How do you check if the company is carrying on business in the UK?' on the previous page.

Use Companies House free Webcheck service at:  
[www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk)

### What do you need to record?

You must record:

- The name as it is shown on the register
- The LLP's registered office address

## Unincorporated associations

### What makes an unincorporated association a permissible donor?

An unincorporated association is a permissible donor if:

- It has more than one member.
- The main office is in the UK.
- It is carrying on business or other activities in the UK.

### How do you check permissibility?

There is no register of unincorporated associations. Permissibility is a matter of fact in each case.

In general, an unincorporated association should have:

- An identifiable membership, and
- Rules or a constitution, and
- A separate existence from its members.

For example, members' clubs are sometimes unincorporated associations.

If you are not sure that an association meets the criteria, you should consider whether the donation is actually from individuals within it (rather than the association) or if someone within the association is acting as an agent for others.

If you think this is the case, you must check the permissibility of all individuals who have contributed more than £500 and treat them as the donors.

You can find more information on carrying on business in the previous section 'How do you check if the company is carrying on business in the UK?' on page 7.

If you would like more guidance on permissibility and unincorporated associations, please call or email us.

### What do you need to record?

You will need to record:

- The name of the unincorporated association.
- The company's main office address.

If an unincorporated association makes political donations amounting to more than £25,000 in a calendar year, you should make them aware that they have to report this to us. See our website or call us for more information.

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## Other types of donor

The table below shows how you check permissibility for other types of donor or lender.

Type of donor	Requirement	Where to check
Trade union	Listed as a trade union by the Certification Officer	The Certification Officer <a href="http://www.certoffice.org">www.certoffice.org</a>
Building society	A building society within the meaning of the Building Societies Act 1986	The Financial Services Authority <a href="http://mutuals.fsa.gov.uk">http://mutuals.fsa.gov.uk</a>
Friendly/ industrial provident society	Registered under the Friendly Societies Act 1974 or the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965	The Financial Services Authority <a href="http://mutuals.fsa.gov.uk">http://mutuals.fsa.gov.uk</a>

### What do you need to record?

You will need to record:

- The name of the donor.
- The address, as shown on the relevant register.

# How we can help

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website.

You can contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below. We are here to help, so please get in touch.

Call us on:

- England: 0333 103 1928  
[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- Scotland: 0333 103 1928  
[infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- Wales: 0333 103 1929  
[infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- Northern Ireland: 0333 103 1928  
[infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk)

Visit us at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at:  
[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)