

ACTIONS AND RESOURCES



A Briefing to support Friends wanting to take action to encourage improvements in the criminal justice system in England, Scotland and Wales

“Justice should be compassionate, forgiving and healing – restorative, not retributive. We want to change attitudes and encourage the criminal justice system to move towards this vision of justice.”

QPSW Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee, July 2009



ACTION AND RESOURCES

This document is designed to support the *Learning from Experience* Single Issue Briefings by offering ideas and sources of information for Friends wanting to take action as a result of reading such a Briefing.

Key actions are:

- Be informed.
- Identify and support good practice.
- Support campaigns for positive change.
- Lobby policy makers to implement national recommendations and international rules that would improve matters.

Key resources are:

- What legislators propose as policy and/or practice.
- Information available from non-governmental organisations.
- Quakers' own knowledge, experience, expertise and concern as expressed in their lives and captured in *Quaker Faith & Practice* (particularly Chapters 18 – 29)
- <http://qfp.quakerweb.org.uk/qfpdownloads.html>

NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Within Britain there are difference legal and criminal justice systems affecting sentencing and prisons.

The devolved Scottish Government is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the people of Scotland, including health, education and justice. It has its own Parliament made up of Members (MSPs) elected by both local and regional constituents. Like the UK Parliament it passes laws, debates important issues, and conducts inquiries and publishes reports. MSPs represent their constituents on matters which are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

The UK Parliament is based on a two-chamber system: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected from constituencies across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to sit in the House of Commons.

The laws governing Wales are still mostly decided at Westminster with the Secretary of State for Wales and Members of Parliament (MPs) from Welsh constituencies based there. The Welsh Government is responsible for most of the day-to-day issues, for example health, education, and local government. The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales and holds the Welsh Government to account. It has 60 Assembly Members (AMs).

[Because this Briefing is written primarily for Quakers in Britain Yearly Meeting and Friends in Northern Ireland are members of Ireland Yearly Meeting, details of the Northern Ireland Assembly are not included.]

Actions

Monitor laws and regulations by looking at government reports, Bills and consultation documents. These are all usually available on their websites.

Find out the timetable for the various different stages of consultation, adoption and implementation. Government information sources will give details for any relevant committees or groups of parliamentary/assembly members and reports of debates in the legislature.

Look at Information available from non-governmental organisations such as specialist campaigning and/or lobbying bodies.

Resources

England and Wales

- **Home Office:** lead UK government department for policies including policing, drugs and crime <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>
- **Ministry of Justice:** responsible for the courts, prisons, probation services and attendance centres; works with other government departments and agencies to reform the criminal justice system, to serve the public and support the victims of crime <http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations>
- **Justice Committee:** appointed by House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Ministry of Justice and associated public bodies. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/justice-committee/>
- **Sentencing Council for England and Wales:** promotes greater consistency in sentencing, whilst maintaining the independence of the judiciary by producing guidelines on sentencing for the judiciary <http://sentencingcouncil.judiciary.gov.uk>

Scotland

- **Scottish Government:** for information about strategies, policies and proposals on courts and the legal system, crimes and crime prevention, and public safety. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice>
- **Scottish Parliament:** www.scottish.parliament.uk for information about the work of the Parliament and its members
- **Justice Committee** is to scrutinise the policies and performance of the Scottish Government and its agencies in matters related to justice <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/29845.aspx>
- There are provisions in the **Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Bill 2010** to create a Scottish Sentencing Council which will provide a new sentencing guidelines regime for Scotland.

- **Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office (SCPO)**: created by Scotland's churches to help them build fruitful relationships with the Scottish Parliament and Government, and with the UK Parliament and Government www.actsparl.org

Wales

- **Welsh Government**: information about the government's organisation, programme, publications etc. www.wales.gov.uk
- **National Assembly for Wales**: information about the work of the Assembly and its members, contact details and publications www.assemblywales.org
- **Welsh National Crime Reduction Strategy** and Community Safety Partnership programme: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/crimereduction>

NATIONAL LEGISLATORS

Actions

Make and maintain contact with your legislators, whether Member of Parliament (MP), Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP), Member of the National Assembly for Wales (AM), supporting her or him in taking a balanced view of how best to tackle offending, particularly at a time when legislation is being debated. It is their responsibility to respond to the views of their constituents even when they do not agree with them.

Write to your MP, AM, MSP (and even Member of European Parliament: see below). Most parliamentarians do welcome letters that are presented reasonably and well-argued, and will usually reply personally. The quality (as well as the quantity) of the mail they receive will shape his or her views; in writing you may be representing a significant section of public opinion. You can also ask them to pass on your comments to the relevant minister. This will be the Secretary of State for Justice and other UK Ministers as appropriate (e.g. Minister for Prisons) for England & Wales, and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and other ministers as appropriate (e.g. Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs) for Scotland. Ministers do not normally see letters unless they come through an MP/MSP; if you write direct you will probably get a reply from a civil servant. Friends who have contacts in the House of Lords may also wish to write to them.

Ask to meet your MP, MSP, AM (and even Member of European Parliament) to discuss your concerns with them. Go to their surgery; invite them to meet you at the Friends Meeting House; invite them to attend or speak at an open event (e.g. during Quaker Week).

Although Scotland has a different criminal justice system to that in England and Wales, Friends in Scotland might perhaps want to add their voice to those of Friends in England and Wales by writing in support when there is a corporate statement to the UK Parliament from the Yearly Meeting in Britain, particularly when there are examples of good practice from the situation in Scotland to offer.

Resources

- **Finding your legislators:** Members of UK Parliament are listed at www.parliament.uk ; Members of Scottish Parliament at www.scottish.parliament.uk ; Members of Welsh Assembly listed at www.assemblywales.org
- **Quaker submissions to Consultations** made on behalf of Friends by Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee www.quaker.org.uk/crime-community-justice

INTERNATIONAL LAWS, RULES AND REGULATIONS

UK policies are affected by both European Union and United Nations policies and requirements. The Scottish Government has its own Europe Division responsible for the Government's policy on EU engagement and a Scottish Government European Union Office (SGEUO) in Brussels supporting Government work on EU policy. Details are on the Scottish Government website. The Welsh Assembly has a European Union (EU) Office in Brussels which represents the Welsh Assembly Government's European interests. Details are on the Welsh Government website.

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Monitor laws and regulations by looking at government reports, Bills and consultation documents. These are all usually available on their websites.

Find out the timetable for the various different stages of consultation, adoption and implementation. Government information sources will give details for any relevant committees or groups of parliamentary/assembly members and reports of debates in the legislature.

Promote in the UK good practice from elsewhere such as the 'Bangkok Rules' which contains 70 rules for the treatment of women prisoners under arrest and awaiting trial.

Resources

- **European Parliament:** the English language version of the European Parliament website, with information about the EU, the Parliament, its activities, and MEPs www.europarl.europa.eu/en
- **Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA)** works with both the Council of Europe and the European Union structures – the UK being a Member State of both. They have published reports on social reintegration of ex-offenders, conditions of women in prison, and alternatives to imprisonment, within Council of Europe Member States. www.qcea.org
- **Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva (QUNO)**, engages with the UN human rights and criminal justice systems on issues of women in prison, children of prisoners, and restorative justice both in the regular criminal justice system and in post-conflict situations. www.quno.org
- **Bangkok Rules:** Briefing on the UN rules for the treatment of women prisoners and non-custodial measure for women offenders ('Bangkok Rules') 2011 www.quno.org

All QUNO and QCEA publications are available from them in hard copies and from their websites.

RAISING AWARENESS, SHARING YOUR CONCERNS

Actions

Write to newspapers which appear to be whipping up a fear of crime without good cause, distorting crime statistics, misrepresenting young people, undermining confidence in Judges and Magistrates and using un-necessarily derogatory language to describe offenders.

Telephone phone-in programmes on local radio stations. Share your own experiences, and contribute to discussions which seem to lack balance.

Use a variety of techniques to contact the media, organisations, individuals et al, e.g. email, twitter, social networking, consultations & invitations on websites.

Raise and test concerns through Quaker discipline in your Local Meeting, Area Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings. [*Quaker Faith & Practice 13:02-18*]

Use the *Learning from Experience Single Issue Briefings* and other publications to explore the issues – for yourself and with others; as a focus for discussion; when expressing concerns to policy-makers and others; to help other people become more aware of the underlying issues. All Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee publications are available in hard copies and most can be downloaded from the Britain Yearly Meeting website. www.quaker.org.uk/crime-community-justice

Join national specialist bodies such as Howard League, Prison Reform Trust, Restorative Justice Council and Sacro, who all produce briefings on a range of issues and on relevant legislation and usually make their own responses available on their website. They also often run campaigns individuals can get involved with.

Resources

- **Howard League for Penal Reform:** programme of work on women in the penal system. www.howardleague.org / **Howard League Scotland** www.howardleaguescotland.org.uk
- **Prison Reform Trust:** information and campaigning, including Smart Justice for Women www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk
- **Restorative Justice Council:** www.restorativejustice.org.uk
- **SACRO:** T: 0131 624 7270 / E: info@national.sacro.org.uk

ASKING QUESTIONS

Actions

Asking questions can draw to the attention of policy-makers the elements of a Quaker vision for a more compassionate criminal justice system. Getting answers to the questions should enable you to make informed representation to policy-makers when you are trying to change (or support) their proposals.

Questions can be put to the people responsible for formulating policy, and those who implement it; and to people standing for election to serve on public bodies as well as during government elections. This might include:

- government departments for justice, home affairs, health, education, housing, employment, social affairs, women and children;
- Ombudsman offices and other national human rights institutions; police, legal aid, probation and prison services and their professional bodies;
- courts, judges, prosecutors, the legal profession; local government, social services, employment, housing and children's services; physical and mental health institutions and providers;
- independent quality control and monitoring bodies;
- specialist civil society organisations (for example those working on women, children, healthcare and health promotion, prison and criminal justice reform).
- the leaders of local authorities and councilors (about local strategies and services)
- the Police and Crime Commissioner for your area responsible for the funding relating to policy and reducing crime, and for the strategic direction and aims for the police force.

Freedom of Information Act gives you the right to ask any public body for all the information it has on any subject you choose. There are no restrictions on your age, nationality or where you live. You can ask for any information at all, but some might be withheld to protect various interests. It is usually more effective to ask for information on clearly defined specific areas than to request a lot of information at one time. If information is withheld, the public body must tell you why. Scotland has its own Freedom of Information Act, which is very similar to the England, Wales and Northern Ireland Act.

Resources

- The websites for the individual legislative bodies will provide guidance on asking questions under the Freedom of Information Act, as does the website for DirectGov. www.direct.gov.uk
- **Police and Crime Commissioners** (in England & Wales): www.apccs.police.uk. **Safer Future Communities:** project run by CLINKS to help local voluntary and community groups work with PCCs www.clinks.org/services/sfc

GETTING INVOLVED

- **Our *Learning from Experience*** project involves Friends collecting real stories from real people about their experiences of the criminal justice system. The stories already received provide a rich accumulation of such experiences. We are using these when addressing policy makers and as the basis for new materials now being prepared to inform and engage Friends further. Contact paulah@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1036
- **Get involved in the criminal justice system:** We publish a booklet with signposts to further information about some of the opportunities for doing this. *Quakers, crime, community and justice: ways to get involved in the criminal justice system*. QPSW. 2012. Contact paulah@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1036
- **Quakers in Criminal Justice** is an informal network offering mutual support for Friends in any way involved in the criminal justice system, professionally, as volunteers, and also those who have personal experience of such as ex-offenders and ex-prisoners. www.qicj.org.

This is one in a series of publications arising from the “Learning from Experience personal narratives from the criminal justice system” project of the Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee (CCJS). QPSW is part of the central organisation of Quakers in Britain, and CCJS supports and represents Quaker concerns in the area of criminal justice.

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