

“Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your town and country, and do not shirk the effort and time this may demand. Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear; try to discern the new growing-points in social and economic life. Work for an order of society which will allow men and women to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.”

*Quaker faith & practice 23.01*

This guide forms part of the election resources produced by Quakers in Britain for the 2015 general election. Visit [www.quakervote.org.uk](http://www.quakervote.org.uk) to read detailed briefings, find out more about particular topics or get involved in events.

You can also follow @quakervote, talk about #quakervote or email [quakervote@quaker.org.uk](mailto:quakervote@quaker.org.uk).

Contact Jessica Metheringham, Parliamentary Engagement Officer for Quakers in Britain, at [jessicam@quaker.org.uk](mailto:jessicam@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1107.

For a large-print edition of this document please contact [publications@quaker.org.uk](mailto:publications@quaker.org.uk) or call 020 7663 1162.

# General election 2015

## a guide for Quakers

This guide is for individuals and groups interested in knowing more about the forthcoming general election. It provides an overview of some of the key issues for Quakers in Britain, suggesting questions that Quakers may wish to ask their parliamentary candidates. It also contains advice about holding hustings and engaging with the election.

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## General election info

### Basic facts

The UK is divided into **650** constituencies of roughly equal size.

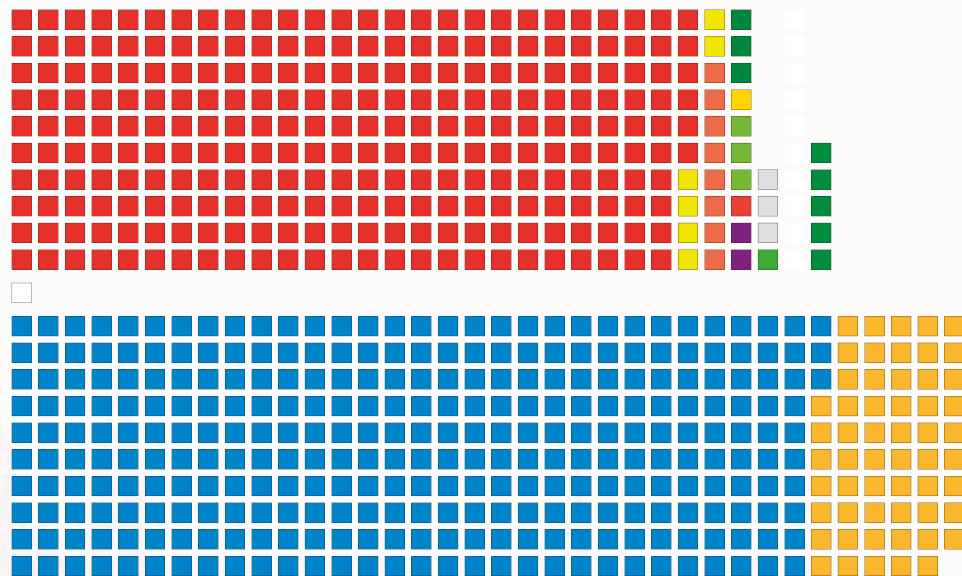
On average, there are **68,175** voters in each constituency.

The current House of Commons consists of the following parties:

#### Government:

303 Conservatives and 56 Liberal Democrats.

**Opposition:** 257 Labour, 6 Scottish National Party, 8 Democratic Unionist, 3 Plaid Cymru, 1 Alliance, 3 Social Democratic and Labour, 1 Respect, 2 UKIP, 1 Green and 3 Independent. John Bercow, who is a Conservative and the Speaker, is by tradition not opposed at the election. The 5 Sinn Féin MPs choose not to take their seats in Parliament.



Under the current system of first-past-the-post the largest party (and therefore the one that gets to form a government) is determined by the results of a handful of the 650 constituencies. Based solely on the results of the 2010 general election, the 15 most marginal constituencies are likely to be:

- Fermanagh and South Tyrone
- Hampstead and Kilburn
- North Warwickshire
- Cambourne and Redruth
- Bolton West
- Thurrock
- Oldham East and Saddleworth
- Hendon
- Sheffield Central
- Solihull
- Oxford West and Abingdon
- Ashfield
- Southampton Itchen
- Cardiff North
- Sherwood.

Fermanagh and South Tyrone is in Northern Ireland and so is part of Ireland Yearly Meeting rather than Britain Yearly Meeting.



### Representation

As well as Members of Parliament, everyone in the UK is represented by:

- at least one local councillor
- at least three Members of the European Parliament.

The numbers depend on how large an area your representatives cover.

You may also be represented by:

- the Scottish Parliament
- the Welsh Assembly
- the London Assembly
- additional local councillors
- a directly elected mayor and/or police and crime commissioner (PCC).

### What happens after 2015?

The next general election is planned for 2020. In 2016 there will be elections for the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, all councils in Scotland and Wales, some councils in England, and the London Assembly and Mayor. Other English councils elect in 2017 and 2018. The next European Parliament election will be held in 2019.

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# Introduction



Photo: Neil Cummings

## Using this guide

This guide is for Quakers and meetings ahead of the 2015 general election.

It's about raising awareness and stimulating debate. Can we get a conversation going about our concerns? Can we educate ourselves and others about important issues that may come up during the election?

It's also about influencing candidates. Rather than asking parliamentary candidates to make specific commitments, we ask them to consider particular topics.

This guide is intended to help you decide which political issues are most important to you and how to use the general election as a chance to engage with candidates and others in your community.

## What's included in this guide?

The next 20 pages cover some of the current concerns of Quakers in Britain. Each outlines the issue, suggests some questions to ask candidates, and tells you where to find further information.

Some of these concerns form part of the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting, while others are being taken forward by listed informal groups. Not all Quaker work is included here. We have judged what to include partly by considering what we thought was likely to be of interest to non-Quakers during the election: as worthy as a concern may be, we felt that priority should be given to those concerns that candidates are likely to be aware of already or that have a reach beyond Quaker circles. This does not mean that meetings or individuals need to stick to the topics in this guide – this is just the start of a wider conversation.

If you're interested in finding out more about any of the issues, you can request briefings from our A–Z of resources.

## About the questions

Each of the topics contains a small amount of information and some possible questions to ask parliamentary candidates.

Use these questions in letters, in individual conversations, and in hustings. There's only space on each page for a few questions, so if the specific issue you're concerned about isn't there then it's probably not a deliberate omission. Feel free to use our questions as inspiration for your own.

Before you ask a candidate a question, think about why you're asking it. Is it because you want to raise general awareness of the issue? Is it because you want the candidate to know what you think? Is it because you want to know what the candidate thinks? These are all good reasons for asking a question, but the wording of the question may be different for each. If you wanted to know what the candidate thinks you probably wouldn't start with a statement that clearly sets out your own position.

## Activities for meetings

At the back of this guide are some activity suggestions for meetings. These are just the start – have a think about how your meeting might use these resources.

These suggestions aren't just for meetings, but for groups of all sorts, for the wider community and for individuals. The election is an opportunity to encourage greater involvement in democracy and politics.

## Encouraging everyone to vote

The election period ends with polling day on 7 May. For candidates and parties, this is what they have been aiming towards; it is the end, the final goal, after which their work changes dramatically or ceases to exist. For campaigners it is part of the bigger picture of raising awareness, as our activities continue after election day.

Almost every adult can vote, but many don't. How can we encourage our friends and neighbours to vote? Voting is an important part of democracy – vital for the political system as we know it and a way of bringing about change. It is by no means the only way to get involved in politics, but it does provide a link between individuals and the state, a duty, a way to be included, to stand up and be counted.

Another thing we can do is talk about the

## Other resources

This guide is the start of the conversation. We hope you, as meetings, as communities and as individuals, can help to continue it – right up until the election on 7 May.

It is also only one part of the work Britain Yearly Meeting is doing ahead of the general election. Our election project contains four parts:

1. This election guide, which provides an overview of key Quaker concerns.
2. An online A–Z of Quaker briefings and leaflets produced over the last few years, which meetings and individuals can download.
3. A series of web-based seminars on some key topics, which will be available to watch again online.
4. Hustings with the main political parties.

More information about all of these resources is available at [www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote).

election. We can speak to others in our community, particularly those we don't normally speak to. We can tell them who we are voting for and why. We can also ask them who they intend to vote for and listen to their reasons why. We can discuss the issues that matter to us, what we want to see from our elected representatives, and what we want our community to be like.

Many people vote in anger or as a form of protest. By opening up discussions ahead of the election we can encourage others to vote for those who genuinely have ideas on how politics can be improved rather than for unfocused mavericks. We can encourage our friends and neighbours to vote for those who will work with hope and compassion, who will work cooperatively and take part in politics, who will pursue policies that are well considered and based on evidence, and who will listen to the views of others.



## Militarisation in schools



Photo: © 2011 Crown Copyright

There is a creeping militarisation of some schools, which involves a range of projects that encourage schools to foster a 'military ethos', in addition to the military visits to schools that already take place. Projects include alternative provision by military-style organisations for children excluded from mainstream education, the fast-tracking of ex-forces personnel into schools under the 'Troops to Teachers' programme, and the expansion of the Combined Cadet Force into more state schools.

The increasing role of the military in education is part of a deliberate government strategy to increase militarisation, thereby prioritising and normalising military solutions to conflict. A one-sided perspective of 'military ethos' is presented, one that reduces the likelihood of criticism of the military and war. Values such as leadership, discipline and motivation can be fostered in children and young people in a variety of ways, from peer mediation and conflict-handling programmes to mentoring and the creative arts. The prioritisation of a military approach, at the expense of others, has not been adequately justified.

Quakers would like a halt to the role of the military in education, wider scrutiny of the 'military skills and ethos programme', and more investment in peace education.

### Questions for candidates

Why is it that in 2014 the UK is the only country in Europe to recruit 16-year-olds into its armed forces? Do you agree with UNICEF and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that the recruitment age should be raised to 18?

Should the teaching of conflict resolution be receiving more government funding and support in our schools?

The military should not be seen as a simple solution to complex social problems, yet the 'military skills and ethos' policy is being implemented without consultation. Should parents have a say in whether their children are exposed to greater military involvement in their education?

### Find out more

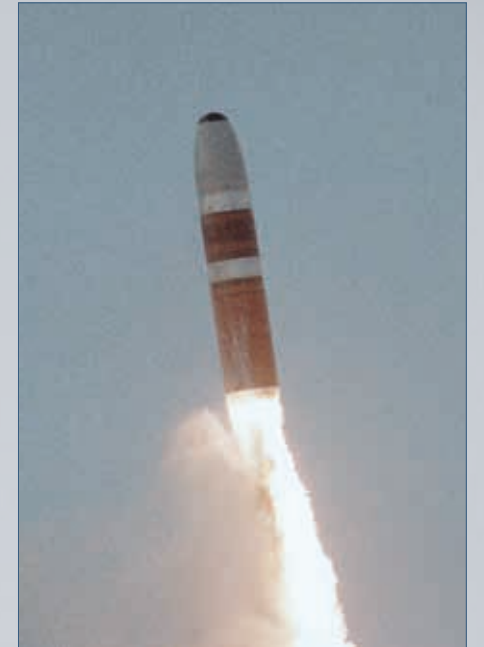
- [www.quaker.org.uk/militarisation](http://www.quaker.org.uk/militarisation)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Isabel Cartwright: [isabelc@quaker.org.uk](mailto:isabelc@quaker.org.uk).

## Trident

The decision to replace Trident nuclear submarines is to be taken in 2016. The proposed renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system would cost £100 billion and commit this country to possessing nuclear weapons for another generation. At the same time the rest of the world is pushing for a treaty to ban all nuclear weapons.

Quakers in Britain have consistently opposed nuclear weapons as they are designed to cause death and suffering on a scale unparalleled in history. This general election is an opportunity to put the issue of Trident back on the political agenda. The main parties in England and Wales all favour renewal, but individual parliamentary candidates can be urged to vote against it, with opinion polls indicating that a large majority of UK voters would support them in doing so.



*"...a gospel of love cannot be defended by the threatened annihilation of millions of innocent people."*

*Quaker faith & practice 24.27*

### Questions for candidates

Do you think every country in the world has the right to defend itself with nuclear weapons?

Do you think that renewing Trident sends the right signal to the 156 countries who do not possess nuclear weapons and want to see their total elimination?

Would you go ahead with Trident renewal even if the rest of the world decided to make the possession of nuclear weapons illegal under international law?

Do you feel it is a proper use of public funds to sign contracts for up to £100 billion for a project that could be declared illegal under international law?

### Find out more

- [www.quaker.org.uk/disarm](http://www.quaker.org.uk/disarm)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Tim Wallis: [disarm@quaker.org.uk](mailto:disarm@quaker.org.uk).

Other organisations working on Trident and providing useful information include:

- CND: [www.cnduk.org/campaigns/no-to-trident](http://www.cnduk.org/campaigns/no-to-trident)
- WMD Awareness Group: [www.wmdawareness.org.uk](http://www.wmdawareness.org.uk)
- Rethink Trident: [www.rethinktrident.org.uk](http://www.rethinktrident.org.uk)
- BASIC: [www.basicint.org](http://www.basicint.org)



## Israel and Palestine

Quakers have a long history of working on the ground in Israel and Palestine, looking towards a time when the deep fear experienced on all sides is replaced by security and a just peace. Currently, Quaker Peace & Social Witness manages the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) in the UK and Ireland on behalf of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland and other agencies.

The violence experienced in Gaza during summer 2014 was only the latest reminder of the deep and long-running conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Amid this crisis, Quakers agreed their call for action to bring about a just end to the occupation. In a statement issued by Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath in August 2014, the following steps were called for:

- Palestine to be recognised as a nation state
- an end to indiscriminate fire by all sides
- a comprehensive arms embargo
- an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and blockade of Gaza
- freeing elected Palestinian leaders now held as political prisoners
- the use of international law to hold all parties to account for their actions.

### Questions for candidates

Do you think the UK should continue to sell arms to Israel?

Do you support calls for a UK-wide ban on trade with illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem?

Do you support the result of the vote in the UK Parliament in October 2014 that called on the government to recognise Palestine as a nation state as a contribution to securing a negotiated two-state solution?

*“A desire for peace without truthfulness is worthless and does not bring about peace; without love truth has no effect because it is not heard.”*

*Quaker faith & practice 24.34*

### Find out more

- [www.quaker.org.uk/eappi](http://www.quaker.org.uk/eappi)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Teresa Parker: [teresap@quaker.org.uk](mailto:teresap@quaker.org.uk).

Visit the website of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for facts and information on occupied Palestine: [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org).

To read the Quaker statement on Israel and Palestine in full: [www.quaker.org.uk/news/quakers-urge-recognition-palestine](http://www.quaker.org.uk/news/quakers-urge-recognition-palestine).

## International conflict and peace

The UK, with less than one per cent of the world's population, is the world's fifth largest exporter of arms. It has the world's sixth largest military budget. It is second only to the USA in terms of deploying its military forces abroad and bombing other countries. And yet 30 countries invest more in educating their children, 33 countries have fewer people below the poverty line, and 81 countries have lower unemployment rates than the UK.

What does this say about our national priorities? Do these figures reflect the kind of state we want the UK to be in the 21st century? Or should we now be turning our attention to meeting human needs at home and abroad?



Photo: Britain Yearly Meeting

*“You cannot foster harmony by the apparatus of discord, nor cherish goodwill by the equipment of hate. [...] The only true safety is the safety of all, and unless your weapon of defence achieves this work, or works towards this, it is a source of antagonism and therefore of increased peril.”*

*Quaker faith & practice 24.40*

### Questions for candidates

Do you think UK taxpayers should be subsidising the production and sale of British-made weapons to other countries to the tune of £700 million a year?

Do you think the UK should comply with international law or does it have the right to bomb or send its armed forces into other countries without express authorisation from the UN Security Council?

Do you think we as a country should be spending nearly £40 billion a year on the military when we could be spending it on the NHS, schools, or other public services?

### Find out more

- [www.quaker.org.uk/disarm](http://www.quaker.org.uk/disarm)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Tim Wallis: [disarm@quaker.org.uk](mailto:disarm@quaker.org.uk).

Other organisations working on Trident and providing useful information include:

- Campaign Against Arms Trade: [www.caat.org.uk](http://www.caat.org.uk)
- UN Development Programme Human Development Reports: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2014-human-development-report-media-package>



## Education

Photo: © 2013 Jane Hobson



Quakers have recently focused a longstanding concern for education on changes in state education in England.

Quakers believe that the spirit of God is at work in everyone, and this belief holds true for our work in education. This is why we are committed to working towards schools where people matter, where they thrive through good relationships and where the whole person can be affirmed. We believe people truly flourish in an all-embracing culture of encouragement, nurture and compassion for teachers, children and young people. The purpose of education is the pursuit of learning, knowledge and questioning in the service of realising our full human potential in an ever-changing world. Its fruits include: discernment, creativity, cooperation, spirituality, moral autonomy and peace.

### Questions for candidates

What would you do to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds can fully participate and benefit from education?

How would you ensure that league tables include more about the social development of children?

What would you do to provide teachers with caring support and high quality development?

How would you listen to teachers and take their experience and knowledge to those responsible for making political decisions about education?

How would you address the inequalities in funding and inadequacies in support for maintained schools and the lack of transparency in decisions about academies?

*“The two qualities which are most important to children of today are hope and imagination. Hope to believe they can change the world they live in and imagination to find ways to do so.”*

*Quaker faith & practice 23.85*

### Find out more

This is a new expression of our concern for education. It will be further tested as it develops potential actions at local and national level. Although this concern is not currently focused on independent Quaker schools, the issue may be raised by others and it may therefore be advisable to have considered a response in advance.

For more information about the concern: [educationdesk@quaker.org.uk](mailto:educationdesk@quaker.org.uk)

## Drugs, gambling and alcohol

### Drugs

While drug problems affect every group in society, those in disadvantaged groups are disproportionately affected. There are services for people affected by drug problems that can be accessed voluntarily, but funding can be a problem at local level, especially for the more expensive treatment services like residential rehabilitation units. Although sentencing guidelines suggest community penalties, around 1,000 people a year are sent to prison for drug possession.

### Questions for candidates

Would you support more provision for drug treatment locally, including residential help, and an increased emphasis on health provision during all stages of the legal process?

Would you support a Royal Commission for drug issues?

### Gambling

There are around a third of a million problem gamblers in the UK, with many others (including friends and families) affected. Additionally, local councils cannot refuse to license a new gambling business on the grounds of numbers, even if there are already many premises in the area. A particular concern is fixed-odds betting terminals, which allow stakes of up to £100 on a single spin. Many local councils have asked for more powers to limit these.

### Questions for candidates

Do you agree that no advertisements for gambling should be shown before 9pm?

Problem gambling is increasingly recognised as an addiction. Do you think the Department of Health should be more involved in treatment and policy?

### Alcohol

Alcohol is a significant factor for ill-health and premature death. A key issue for harm prevention is price. Lower prices are associated with increased health problems and alcohol-related disorders. Scotland has already passed a law to introduce a minimum unit price, yet to come into effect because of legal challenges. The UK government considered a minimum unit price but did not adopt it.

### Questions for candidates

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Alcohol Misuse and many other bodies recommend a minimum unit price because it would reduce crime and improve health. Do you support this recommendation?

### Find out more

Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs works in accordance to Quaker principles to address the widespread use and misuse of alcohol, prescribed and illegal drugs and gambling. Contact QAAD Director Helena Chambers at [helenaqaad@hotmail.com](mailto:helenaqaad@hotmail.com) or visit [www.qaad.org](http://www.qaad.org).



## Housing

Photo: Quaker Housing Trust



Housing is more than merely a financial investment: it is an integral element of social and economic justice. Inequality in housing is widening, and housing options for people are narrowing.

Secure and appropriate accommodation is essential for enabling people to create a *home* in which to thrive. People should be able to afford the housing they need regardless of whether or not they are in receipt of housing benefit, and regardless of whether they are renting or buying their home.

Quakers' long-held concern for the provision of sufficient homes is also closely linked to the sustainability of healthy communities and societies. We have a collective responsibility for housing our population, our neighbours.

### Questions for candidates

How would you increase the range of good quality, well-managed, and genuinely affordable housing?

How would you cater for the housing needs of all vulnerable people, regardless of age, income, mental or physical health, citizenship or background?

How would you attract funding from a variety of sources into housing at all levels: construction, conversion, repair, maintenance?

How would you take account of environmental and community needs when implementing plans for new housing?

*“The housing conditions of others – and our own – are inseparably spiritual, practical and political issues for us.”*

Yearly Meeting Statement: Our housing concern, 1993

### Find out more

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Paula Harvey: paulah@quaker.org.uk.

Other organisations providing useful information include:

- Quaker Housing Trust: *Principles for a just housing policy* at [www.qht.org.uk](http://www.qht.org.uk).
- Housing Justice: see their *Busting the Myths: An Alternative Manifesto for Housing* at <http://tinyurl.com/HJ-AMfH>.
- National Housing Federation: see their ‘Homes for Britain’ campaign at <http://tinyurl.com/NHF-HfBC>.

## Funeral poverty and end of life

### Funeral poverty

Many of us would now struggle to pay for a funeral. Funeral costs have rocketed by 80 per cent since 2004, and the average funeral now costs £3,456. Quaker Social Action, a charity working in East London, is running a targeted campaign in coalition with other interested parties, aimed at tackling the issue on a national level. The project aims firstly to encourage conversations, getting people to discuss, confront and plan for death; secondly to engage the funeral industry, promoting transparency around the costs of funerals; and thirdly to influence policy-makers and explore state support for funerals.

### Questions for candidates

Many people find it hard to pay for funerals. What would you do to make them more affordable?

*“Loneliness after loss is a bitter and unproductive fruit that generally has to be eaten, skin, stone and all. Meanwhile the table bearing the accustomed spiritual refreshment has vanished, as though it never existed”*

Quaker faith & practice 22.81

### End of life

What happens at the end of our lives is an emerging concern for some Quakers, and one which is likely to emerge for politicians ahead of the election. Our concerns may involve attitudes towards death and dying, preparation for one's own death, palliative care and assisted dying. There are a variety of views, and Quakers are encouraged to find their truth through their own circumstances. Careful and sensitive discussion can gently push through taboos to provide compassion in a time of pain and loss.

Recent legislation in both Westminster and the Scottish Parliament has stimulated debate around whether competent people with terminal illnesses have a right to die. This is an emotive issue and we must be sensitive to the fact that we may hold different views.

### Questions for candidates

Assisted dying is an emotional and deeply personal topic. If you were faced with a vote on assisted dying, how would you respond to your constituents, both those who agreed with your view and those who didn't?

### Find out more

- Funeral poverty: [www.quakersocialaction.com/end-funeral-poverty](http://www.quakersocialaction.com/end-funeral-poverty)
- Quaker Life: [www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-life](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-life)
- Quaker Concern around Dying and Death (a listed informal group): [concernarounddyinganddeath@quaker.org.uk](mailto:concernarounddyinganddeath@quaker.org.uk)



## Energy justice

Quakers in Britain are calling for an economy and energy system that does not rely on fossil fuels. Companies already have in their reserves far more oil, gas and coal than we can afford to burn if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Yet they are identifying new sources of fossil fuels and developing unconventional means to extract these, such as hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking'. UK policy continues to support this trend and insufficiently regulate the power of fossil fuel companies, despite the Climate Change Act, which commits the government to cutting national greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80 per cent by 2050.

We are committed to speaking out against the extraction and use of all unconventional fossil fuels, including tar sands oil and fracked gas. We call for policies that decarbonise the energy sector and incentivise energy efficiency, consumption reduction and renewable alternatives.

Continued reliance on fossil fuels will most affect the poorest. Everyone has the right to energy that is both affordable and does not harm the earth. We are taking action for a transition to a sustainable energy system and economy – one that is fair for people as well as the earth by creating green jobs and providing affordable, low-carbon energy for all.



Photo: Ellis Brooks for Britain Yearly Meeting

### Questions for candidates

The UK energy sector needs a decarbonisation target in place as soon as possible. What will you and your party do to ensure this happens?

How would you incentivise the growth of renewable energy, including community energy projects?

Many people can't afford to heat their homes over the winter. We can't afford to ignore climate change either. How would you tackle fuel poverty in a long-term, sustainable manner?

Fracking is not a solution to climate change. Will you call for the immediate cessation of the exploration and extraction of natural gas and oil from the UK's shale formations?

### Find out more

● [www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability](http://www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Sunniva Taylor: [sunnivat@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sunnivat@quaker.org.uk).

## Climate change

The crisis of global climate change represents a supreme test of humanity's collective wisdom and courage. Our immoderate use of the earth's resources violates the entire biosphere. Many of the poorest people are already suffering as a result of a changed climate.

Our faith response is that prevailing social values have obscured what it means to live authentically on this earth. In rich European countries many of us consume more than we need within an economic system that divides us as a society.

Quakers call for unprecedented international cooperation to enable the large cuts in global emissions that are needed. Any agreement must put the world's poorest first; it falls to richer countries to bear the greater burden of responsibility for change. We need a shift away from measuring wellbeing in terms of economic growth and consumption, and to think instead about how we build sustainable communities.

We also call on the UK government to remain committed to the UK Climate Change Act. This means maintaining carbon budgets and the growth of sustainable and renewable alternatives.

*"Where we see crisis,  
we also see opportunity  
to remake society as a  
communion of people  
living sustainably as part  
of the natural world"*

Quaker response to the crisis of climate change, 2009

### Questions for candidates

What will your party do to ensure that a strong and binding agreement is made at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations in Paris in 2015?

Do we have a responsibility to reduce our collective consumption in the UK, recognising both our historic and ongoing contribution to global warming and the fact that no one should live in fuel poverty?

### Find out more

● [www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability](http://www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Sunniva Taylor: [sunnivat@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sunnivat@quaker.org.uk).



## Social security

Controversial social security cuts such as the household benefit cap and the spare room subsidy (known as the 'bedroom tax'), combined with new assessment and sanctions processes, are causing unacceptable hardship within our communities.

The Quaker commitment to community means we have a responsibility to respect and care for all, yet benefit delays, sanctions and cuts drove hundreds of thousands of people to food banks last year. The cuts have often been justified by a divisive public discourse that disparages claimants, falsely implies that fraud is widespread and fails to recognise that a large proportion of benefit claimants are actually in paid work.

The social security system alone cannot 'solve' the problems of poverty and inequality in Britain. However, in one of the world's richest countries, it must at the very least ensure that no one faces hunger or destitution. As well as injecting some honesty and human dignity back into the debate around social security, there is an urgent need to review the recent changes with a view to rebuilding a safety net that is fit for purpose.

### Questions for candidates

Do you agree that the state should care for all who need it?

What should we do to ensure that food banks are unnecessary?

How can we develop a more balanced debate about the social security system?

Is it right to impose tough conditions on the receipt of benefits and to apply sanctions when those conditions aren't met?

Should the welfare state subsidise employers who pay less than the living wage?

Should any of the recent changes to the social security system be repealed?

*"We value that of God in each person, and affirm the right of everyone to contribute to society and share in life's good things, beyond the basic necessities. [...] We find ourselves utterly at odds with the priorities in our society which deny the full human potential of millions of people in this country. That denial diminishes us all. There must be no 'them' and 'us'."*

*Quaker faith & practice 23.21*

### Find out more

● [www.quaker.org.uk/economic-justice](http://www.quaker.org.uk/economic-justice)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Suzanne Ismail: [suzannei@quaker.org.uk](mailto:suzannei@quaker.org.uk).

## Economic inequality

With the richest 20 per cent of our population owning almost 100 times the wealth of the poorest 20 per cent, Britain is one of the most unequal societies in the developed world.

Inequality has grown steadily since the 1980s as society has emphasised individual wealth creation over community responsibility and the common good. There are credible fears that recent social security cuts will accelerate this trend in the short term.

Evidence shows that more equal societies are better for everyone. Together with our Quaker commitment to equality, this demands a more explicit political recognition of the harm, instability and wasted opportunity engendered by high levels of economic inequality. Narrowing the gap between the rich and the rest should become an economic priority.

*"We are angered that the UK now has a greater disparity in income than at any time since the Second World War and are compelled to speak out against government policy that makes cuts in spending that promote inequality."*

Meeting for Sufferings statement on equality, March 2012

### Find out more

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Suzanne Ismail: [suzannei@quaker.org.uk](mailto:suzannei@quaker.org.uk).

Read recommendations for the election from the Equality Trust at [www.equalitytrust.org.uk](http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk) and from the New Economics Foundation at [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org).

Photo: Sunniva Taylor for Britain Yearly Meeting





## Discrimination against disability



Photo: © 2010 Mike Pinches

Discrimination can take many forms. It can be because of something fundamental to a person, such as their race, gender or sexuality. It can be because of education, social class or wealth. Discrimination is sometimes clear and obvious, at other times subtle. It comes not just from individuals, but from the traditions of our communities and the structures of our environment.

Discrimination against disabled people is a particular concern. A widespread lack of understanding means that cultural expectations of disability are narrow and limiting. People who use wheelchairs due to fatigue or who are partially sighted are often wrongly perceived as 'not really disabled', a worrying form of discrimination. Welfare reform by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has led to many people being assessed as fit for work under conditions that limit understanding of disability or long-term chronic illness. Our Quaker commitment to equality leads us to call for a benefits system that is fair and unbiased, and a National Health Service that is accessible to all.

### Questions for candidates

What would you do to encourage mental health to be taken as seriously as physical health?

Many of the DWP's work capability assessments appear to have misunderstood people's requirements, ignored medical advice, and made inaccurate assumptions as to what individuals with particular disabilities can do, particularly with regard to fatigue. What do you think needs to happen to address this?

Disabled people who are out of work have been subject to sanctions and pressure to find work they can do, but many employers have ungrounded worries about hiring disabled people. What would you do to put pressure on employers to employ disabled people on an equal basis?

The Equality Act 2010 sets out strong protections for disabled people, but many say these are hard to enforce. What would you do to make the protections of the Equality Act a reality?

### Find out more

- Quaker Disability Equality Group (QDEG), a listed informal group: [www.quakerdisabilitygroup.org.uk](http://www.quakerdisabilitygroup.org.uk)

## Prejudice and equality

### Prejudice

Equality is a cornerstone of a society that affirms our common humanity and recognises wellbeing and human fulfilment as a collective desire. Prejudice and inequality may be found throughout society, whether in everyday sexism and racism, assumptions about gender and sexuality, or deep-seated values attached to wealth. Too often political discourse divides us into 'strivers and skivers', the deserving and the irresponsible.

As Quakers we have historically spoken out in support of those who experience discrimination and oppression, such as prisoners, slaves, refugees, homeless people, and women. Our testimony to equality compels us to challenge prejudice.

### Questions you could ask candidates

As an MP, you would be able to speak to powerful people, or to wield power yourself. Can you tell me how you would stand up for disadvantaged groups in your constituency?

What role would you play in tackling prejudice, whether in terms of poverty, class or gender?

What would you do to support those who experience homophobic or transphobic attacks and hate speech?

What would you do to tackle gender-based violence, domestic violence and violence against children?

How do you plan to tackle the defamatory language used to misrepresent benefit claimants, refugees and religious groups?

### Find out more

- Quaker Lesbian & Gay Fellowship (QLGF), a listed informal group: [www.qlgf.org.uk](http://www.qlgf.org.uk).



Photo: Britain Yearly Meeting

### Equality

At the 2010 election, Quakers campaigned for same-sex marriage. We told politicians that our commitment to equality means recognising loving relationships between two people of the same sex as equal to those of the opposite sex. For us, this is a matter of faith – we are married by God and are but witnesses.

Following the election we worked with others to raise awareness. We kept in touch with the civil servants writing the new legislation throughout the drafting process and while the bill was before the UK Parliament. We also followed the similar process through the Scottish Parliament. Same-sex marriage was introduced in England and Wales in 2013, and separate legislation in Scotland was passed in 2014.



## Asylum and detention

Photo: Platform 1



For the last few years, net migration to the UK has remained at slightly more than 200,000 people per year. Some people migrate to look for work, others because they are seeking asylum.

Asylum-seekers whose claims are turned down or are never acknowledged are forced into destitution because they are not allowed to work. Often they cannot be returned to their home country but they receive no support or state benefits from the UK. Over 25 per cent of decisions are overturned on appeal.

A related concern is immigration detention. The human and financial costs of detention are high. Detention often seems arbitrary, and there is no time limit. The decision to detain is an administrative one, and so not made by a judge. Quakers would like to see judicial oversight within 72 hours of detention.

### Questions for candidates

Do you think it is right that asylum-seekers should be prevented from working while their cases are being heard, even though this forces them into destitution?

Do you agree that the length of time a person can be held in immigration detention should be limited to 28 days?

The Home Office's own guidance on immigration enforcement is often not followed, an example being the detention of those who have suffered torture in their home countries. What can be done to change this?

As a signatory to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Britain has a responsibility to provide asylum for people "with a well-founded fear of persecution". Do you agree that, in cooperation with other financially stable countries, we should welcome people facing persecution, torture and threats to life in their homeland?

### Find out more

- Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN), a listed informal group: [www.qarn.org.uk](http://www.qarn.org.uk)

*"We believe that neither enforced destitution nor indefinite immigration detention has a place in a just and compassionate system."*

Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) statement, 2014

## Human Rights and torture

### Human Rights

In 1950 the UK signed the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This was a pioneering achievement, which the UK helped to negotiate. The European Court of Human Rights, which upholds the convention, is not part of the European Union, but is a separate institution based in Strasbourg.

In 1998 the UK government passed the Human Rights Act. This upholds the ECHR and means that breaches of these rights can be dealt with in UK courts. In October 2014 the Conservative Party promised to replace the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights and to threaten withdrawal from the ECHR if the Court did not accept UK sovereignty.

Quakers believe that human rights are a fundamental part of society. The Human Rights Act and the ECHR protect all of us.

### Questions for candidates

Do you oppose plans to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights?

How would a British Bill of Rights, as proposed by some political parties, differ from the Human Rights Act?

### Torture

Torture is the infliction of severe mental or physical suffering, with administrative approval, in order to break the will of another person. In spite of more than 150 countries having ratified the UN Convention against Torture, it still happens. Not only does torture do immense damage to victims, it also damages those who commit it, authorise it or collude in its use.

### Questions for candidates

Torture is never acceptable. How would you challenge the myth that it provides reliable information?

How could the UK government be persuaded that there should be no export licences for equipment that could be used for torture?

### Find out more

- Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO): [www.quno.org](http://www.quno.org)
- Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA): [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org)
- Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture (Q-CAT), a listed informal group: [www.q-cat.org.uk](http://www.q-cat.org.uk). Juliet Morton, co-convenor: [juliet@mortonpq.plus.com](mailto:juliet@mortonpq.plus.com).

In 2014 Amnesty International launched a worldwide 'Stop Torture' campaign, which builds on their 50 years of work on the issue: [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk).

*"Torture is a profound evil, causing unimaginable human suffering and corrupting the spiritual and political life of the human family..."*

Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture, 1999



## Criminal justice



Prison sentences have a widespread, deep, and often negative effect on individuals, on families and on the community in general. In 2014 our prisons are full and often under-resourced; prison sentences are getting longer; and reoffending rates are high.

Not everyone who has committed a crime needs to be sent to prison. Not everyone harmed by a crime sees prison as the solution. There are effective alternatives to a prison sentence, such as community sentences and out-of-court disposals.

Quakers have long advocated the use of restorative justice because it seeks to balance the needs of the victim and the community with the reintegration of the offender into society.

### Questions for candidates

When someone is sent to prison, what sort of experience should it be for them and anyone else affected by that imprisonment?

What do you think prison is for?

What alternative forms of sentencing would you advocate for reducing re-offending and making appropriate reparation to victims?

Would you require courts to consider restorative justice in all cases where there is an individual victim who would like to take part?

Do you support voting rights for prisoners?

*“Justice should be compassionate, forgiving and healing – restorative, not retributive.”*

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee, 2009

### Find out more

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Paula Harvey: paulah@quaker.org.uk.

- Quaker Peace & Social Witness for *Why Prison?*, a framework for discussion about the purposes, effectiveness and experience of imprisonment

Other organisations providing useful information include:

- Prison Reform Trust: see their *Bromley Briefing* at <http://tinyurl.com/PRT-BB>.
- Howard League Scotland: <http://howardleaguescotland.org.uk>.

## Representation

Since the 2010 general election some Quakers have found new expressions for deep-seated concerns about representation. The Scottish referendum raised important questions of engagement, authority and identity. After the referendum the Smith Commission was established to consider further devolution to Scotland, with similar questions asked about Wales and Northern Ireland. Attention is also being given to the imbalance of power in England.

Concerns about representation emerge from many different places. As well as being wealthier than the average person, our politicians also tend to be white and male, a pattern followed by the media and business. Power and responsibility are passed down to local councils in unequal measure. What role should the unelected House of Lords play in scrutinising democracy? What role should faith play in politics? Some may feel drawn to consider the merits of a citizen-led constitutional discussion.

This is about how we want our country to function: how decisions should be taken by national, regional and local representatives, and how the different parts of the system should work together.



Photo: Platform 1

*“We are not for names, nor men, nor titles of Government, nor are we for this party nor against the other ... but we are for justice and mercy and truth and peace and true freedom...”*

*Quaker faith & practice 23.11*

### Questions for candidates

What lessons should we learn from the Scottish referendum?

Do you think there should be a constitutional convention, and if so, what part should citizens play in the conversation?

What issues of national significance do you believe should remain within the remit of the UK government and what issues should be devolved to local representative bodies?

Do you think that faith should play a role in politics?

### Find out more

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Jessica Metherringham: jessicam@quaker.org.uk.



## European Union



Photo: Giampaolo Squarcina / Flickr CC

The European Union began as a peace project, bringing together nations that had for centuries been at war. Although the UK declined an invitation to be a founding member in the 1950s, it has been a significant part of the EU since joining its forerunner, the European Communities, in 1973.

The EU deals with issues where states have agreed to work together, including trade, agriculture, climate change and security. UK citizens have a say in the EU through directly elected MEPs, UK government ministers attending the Council of the European Union, the EU Commissioner (currently Jonathan Hill from the House of Lords), and UK civil servants seconded to Brussels.

The Conservatives have promised to hold a referendum on EU membership in 2017. Labour has stated that the EU requires reform, but that it opposes withdrawal. The Liberal Democrats are broadly pro-European, as are the Greens, Plaid Cymru and the SNP. UKIP opposes British membership of the European Union.

### Questions for candidates

What would be the consequences of leaving the EU?

What do you think is good about the EU? Conversely, what do you dislike?

Do you support a referendum on EU membership? Would you vote to remain in the EU or to leave?

Do you feel European?

*“Now if the sovereign princes of Europe, who represent that society or independent state of men that was previous to the obligations of society, would for the same reason that engaged men first into society, viz, love of peace and order, agree to meet by their stated deputies in a general diet, estates, or parliament, and there establish rules of justice for sovereign princes to observe one to another...”*

William Penn, 1693. *Quaker faith & practice* 24.44

### Find out more

- Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA): [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org)

## TTIP Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a Quaker concern because it could increase the power of international corporations and restrict the ability of governments to act in the public interest.

TTIP is a free trade agreement between the USA and the European Union. The agreement is intended to facilitate economic growth. However, this may involve a lowering of European consumer and social protections and prevent the UK from making effective regulation to protect the environment.

The anticipated way of resolving disputes under the agreement is the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS). This would allow an international company to sue a government for passing laws it perceives as threatening its business interests.

It is vital that UK elected representatives understand the full implications of TTIP.



Photo: Ric Lander / Flickr CC

### Questions for candidates

What is your opinion on TTIP and the investor-state dispute settlements it contains?

TTIP seems likely to weaken environmental standards across Europe. Will you speak out against it?

TTIP is placing more power in the hands of international companies. Do you agree that decisions about sustainability or labour and consumer standards should be made by our elected representatives rather than by businesses?

### Interested in knowing more about international politics and Quakers?

The Quaker Council for European Affairs is based in Brussels, where it promotes Quaker values at the European level. It works on issues relating to human rights, peace, economic justice, sustainability and democracy: [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org).

The Quaker United Nations Office is based in Geneva and New York. It represents Quakers' concerns around peace, sustainability, food security, climate change, human rights, refugees and justice: [www.quno.org](http://www.quno.org).

### Find out more

- Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA): [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org)

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Suzanne Ismail: [suzannei@quaker.org.uk](mailto:suzannei@quaker.org.uk).



## What can meetings do?

Photo: © 2010 Mike Pinches



### Hold a hustings

A hustings is when all the candidates are invited to answer questions from an audience. All candidates must be invited unless there are so many that the event would be impracticable, in which case those least likely to win may be excluded. Please see the hustings briefing at [www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote) for detailed information.

Hustings are a valuable chance for everyone in the community to hear the candidates' views, so plan in advance and advertise widely. If you decide to hold a hustings, please let us know by emailing [quakervote@quaker.org.uk](mailto:quakervote@quaker.org.uk).

**When to hold it:** between 30 March and 6 May

**Who to involve:** all the candidates; someone to chair the hustings; a large audience.

Get involved in the election, whether by yourself, as a small group or as a whole community. While the things you can do are limited only by your imagination, here are some ideas.

### Host a panel discussion

This is similar to a hustings, but does not involve candidates from political parties as part of the panel. It could be on a specific subject, such as food banks, or on a broader issue, such as poverty. Do not ask a candidate to be on the panel, even if they are also an expert on the topic being discussed.

**When to hold it:** any time before 7 May

**Who to involve:** three or four experts; someone to chair the discussion; a large or small audience.

**Remember:** A hustings is when all the candidates are invited to answer questions, and a panel discussion is when a group of experts are invited to answer questions.

### Offer a cup of tea

Do you worship in the centre of a busy town or city, where many people pass your meeting house door? Take out a table, two chairs and some cups of tea, and invite passers-by to join you and discuss politics. Encourage them to use their vote, and listen to their views. Talk to them about Quaker values, without suggesting they support any particular party.

**When to hold it:** between 30 March and 6 May

**Who to involve:** a small group of Quakers.

### Facilitate a conversation

Explore an idea further in a small group. Identify a topic or question to consider and ask someone to lead a discussion. You could consider, for example, whether more power should be devolved from Westminster, or whether the UK should leave the EU. You could do this in the style of a round-table discussion (everyone talks over a cup of tea) or as a worship-sharing session. If it is done in the manner of worship you may wish for your local meeting to test this concern.

**When to hold it:** any time before 7 May

**Who to involve:** someone to lead the discussion; 10–20 participants.

### Encourage voter registration

In order to vote, you must be on the electoral register. The electoral register used to be arranged by household, but has recently changed to being arranged by individual. Encourage people to check whether they are on the electoral register. Because local councils need to compile their lists of voters, the deadline for registering is Thursday 16 April. Put up posters in the meeting house windows, speak to people in the street, or encourage Quakers to suggest to friends and family that they check they're registered to vote.

**When:** before 16 April

**Who to involve:** anyone in the meeting who is interested.

### Write to your candidates

Interested in writing to your candidates, but unsure how to start? Put aside a couple of hours after meeting for worship to write letters together, whether that means composing a letter from the meeting or sharing ideas for individual letters. Template letters are available at [www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote).

**When to write:** between 30 March and 6 May

**Who to involve:** anyone in the meeting who is interested.

### Send a minute to your local meeting or your area meeting

In engaging with the election you may have discovered that members of your meeting have particular concerns. You may also have used this time to test concerns of which you were previously aware. Area meetings can help local meetings test concerns and Meeting for Sufferings welcomes minutes about such concerns from area meetings.

**When to send it:** any time, including after the election

**Who to involve:** your local meeting clerk.

### Tell us, tell the community, tell the media

Raise awareness through the media. Invite local journalists to your events, write an article or speak to your local radio station. For advice on speaking out, contact us at [quakervote@quaker.org.uk](mailto:quakervote@quaker.org.uk). Let us know what you're planning so that we can share it with others at [www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quakervote).

**When to do this:** any time before 7 May

**Who to involve:** local Quakers; local journalists; Britain Yearly Meeting staff at [quakervote@quaker.org.uk](mailto:quakervote@quaker.org.uk).