

2016 Scottish Election

a guide for Quakers

This briefing is for individuals and groups interested in knowing more about the 2016 election to the Scottish Parliament. It provides an overview of some of the key issues for Quakers in Scotland, suggesting questions which Quakers may wish to ask their parliamentary candidates. It also contains advice about different ways of becoming engaged in the election.



Election information

Voting for Holyrood

There are 129 members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). At the moment, these MSPs represent these political parties:

Government:

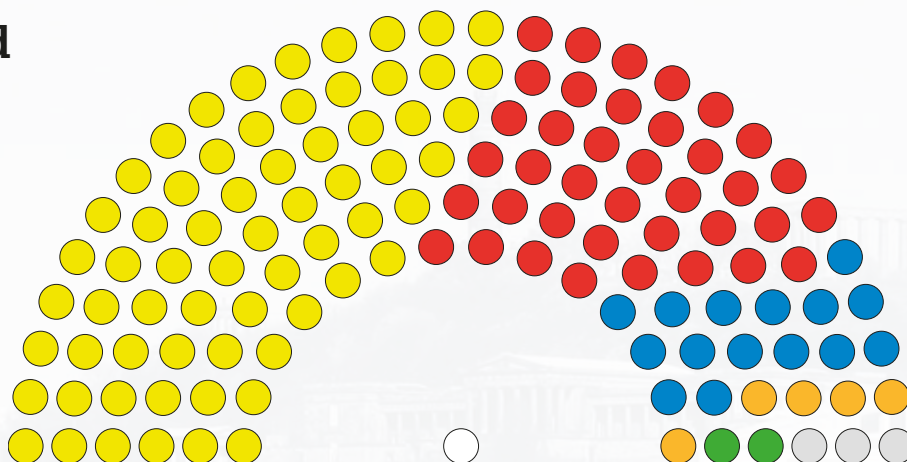
64 Scottish National Party.

Opposition:

38 Labour,
15 Conservative,
5 Liberal Democrats,
2 Green, 3 Independent, and 1 seat which is currently vacant.

There is also a Presiding Officer, who is non-partisan.

73 of the MSPs represent constituencies, while the remaining 56 are list MSPs. The list MSPs are divided into eight regions. On 5 May every voter will have two votes for the Scottish Parliament: one for their constituency and one for their region.



Powers of the Scottish Parliament

Devolved matters include:

- agriculture, forestry and fisheries
- education and training
- environment
- housing
- law and order
(including the licensing of air weapons)
- local government
- sport and the arts
- tourism and economic development
- many aspects of transport
- some benefits and social security

Reserved matters include:

- immigration
- defence
- foreign policy
- broadcasting
- trade and industry
- nuclear energy, oil, coal, gas and electricity





Voting changes

Scotland has a particularly high level of voter engagement and voter registration. However, in December 2015 the method by which the electoral roll is compiled changed from household registration to individual registration. Although everyone registered to vote should have been contacted by their local council, there is a risk that some names may not have been transferred from one system to another. It is therefore particularly important to encourage everyone to make sure that they are still registered to vote.

Find out how at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.



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What happens after May 2016?

The next election for the local authorities in Scotland will take place in 2017. The next UK general election is planned for 2020.

The UK is due to hold a referendum on membership of the European Union before the end of 2017. It is widely anticipated that it will be earlier, between June and September 2016. There is a four month campaigning period for the referendum, meaning that if it was held in June, it would need to be announced in February.

To find out more about other elections taking place during 2016, visit www.quakervote.org.uk.

Introduction



Photo: Neil Cummings

Using this guide

This guide is for Quakers and meetings ahead of the 2016 election.

On 5 May Scotland elects the next Parliament. How can we be involved in the process? What are the issues we care about?

Quakers in Scotland aim to raise awareness and stimulate debate. Can we get a conversation going about our concerns? Can we educate ourselves and others about important issues, such as equality, sustainability, and justice?

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

The information in this guide, and more, is available at www.quakervote.org.uk.

Our Quaker values

Our faith compels us to see that of God in everyone, and to treat all people fairly. During this election we want to uphold and support both the candidates and the wider democratic process. The way in which we approach politics is framed by our commitment to five key testimonies: peace, truth, equality, simplicity and sustainability.

About the questions

There is brief information on each topic and some possible questions to ask candidates.

You can use these questions in letters, individual conversations, and hustings.

There is only space on each page for a few questions, so if the specific aspect you're concerned about isn't there, it's probably not a deliberate exclusion. Use our questions as inspiration for your own.

What's included in this guide?

The next few pages cover some of the current concerns of Quakers in Scotland.

Not all Quaker work is included. Priority has been given to those concerns which candidates are likely to be familiar with and which are of interest beyond Quaker circles. Some matters reserved by the UK government in Westminster have also been included, as we consider that there is a Scottish perspective on these issues too.

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 visit www.quakervote.org.uk.

Other resources

This guide is the start of the conversation. We would like you, as meetings, as communities and as individuals, to help us continue it, right up until the election on 5 May.

This is only one part of the work which Quakers in Scotland are doing for the election to the Scottish Parliament. The information in this guide is also online at www.quakervote.org.uk, where you can find further resources and links to other websites, as well as

information about elections taking place at the same time in other parts of Britain.

If you or your meeting would like to do something for the election, please do get in touch with Mairi Campbell-Jack, the Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer, at mairic@quaker.org.uk. As well as being able to offer advice, Mairi would like to share your stories at www.quakervote.org.uk.

Scotland's future

Last year's referendum on the independence of Scotland was a monumental event, inspiring many people to get involved in politics for the first time and raising important questions of engagement, authority and governance. Immediately after the referendum, the Smith Commission was established to consider further powers to be devolved to Scotland. But questions about Scotland's future are also questions about how we want our country to function. How should decisions be taken by national, regional and local representatives? How should the different parts of the system work together?

While Scotland voted to remain in the UK, the referendum revealed the developing relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK, both in terms of elected representatives and in terms of the relationship between the two governments. More thought is now being given to how Scottish institutions are able to represent Scotland's views on issues where policy differs from the rest of the UK. Although many people have called for pro-independence parties to move on from the referendum, there is also a strong feeling that the matter has not yet been decisively settled, and another referendum is thought by many to be inevitable.

A referendum on the UK's membership of the EU will be held before the end of 2017, and is expected in 2016. Many are concerned that the decision about the EU referendum will be made in a climate of fear. The refugee crisis is currently distorting debate on migration and asylum, with too little compassion for those fleeing persecution. The UK's treatment of asylum seekers is shameful, and the human cost of immigration detention is high. Complex issues such as the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) distort our view of globalisation and the role of trade, while ongoing debates about human rights, terrorism and security can be misleading and inaccurate.

Questions for candidates

Do you think Scotland and the rest of the UK, in co-operation with other economically wealthy countries, should welcome people facing persecution, torture and threats to life in their home country?

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

How might we make the best use of all the powers of the Scottish Parliament?

Militarisation in schools



Photo: © 2011 Crown Copyright

There is a creeping militarisation in many schools across Scotland. We have been working with Forces Watch to uncover school projects designed to encourage a military ethos. Such projects include military visits, fast-tracking ex-forces personnel into schools, and the expansion of cadet forces.

Although the Combined Cadet Force no longer operates in state schools in Scotland, in some places it has been replaced by a Linked Detachment Programme. The Ministry of Defence expects to give further funding to a cadet expansion programme scheme for state schools in deprived areas across the UK, and are talking to the Scottish government about its extension to Scotland.

The increasing role of the military in education is a key component in normalising military solutions and attitudes to conflict. A one-sided perspective is presented, reducing the likelihood of criticism of war. Values such as leadership, discipline and motivation can be fostered in children and young people in many different ways, from peer mediation and conflict-handling programmes to mentoring and creative arts.

Recent research from ForcesWatch indicates that 83 per cent of Scottish state secondary schools were visited by the armed forces during a two-year period, some many times. Many, if not most, of these visits would have been related to careers. We would like to see a halt to the role of the military in education, wider scrutiny of military projects, and more investment in peace education.

Questions for candidates

What are your views on the role of the military in state education?

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

Should parents have a say over whether their children are exposed to greater military involvement in their education?

Have you seen *The Unseen March* (a short video about militarisation available at www.unseenmarch.org.uk)?

Have you read *Armed Forces Visits to Secondary Schools in Scotland* (a report available at www.forceswatch.net/content/armed-forces-visits-schools-scotland)?

Trident

Replacing the Trident nuclear submarines will cost significantly more than £100 billion and commit the UK to possessing nuclear warheads for another generation. At the same time, the rest of the world is pushing for a treaty to ban all nuclear weapons.

Quakers in Scotland, together with Quakers across Britain and around the world, have consistently opposed nuclear weapons on both practical and moral grounds. Many Quakers continue to campaign outside the base at Faslane where the missiles are kept. These weapons are designed to cause death and suffering on a scale unparalleled in history. They are an outdated relic of the Cold War, a hindrance to diplomatic relations with other nations, and a waste of money and skills.

The UK, with less than one per cent of the world's population, is the world's fifth largest exporter of arms and has the world's sixth largest military budget.



Questions for candidates

What would you do to encourage the UK government to reconsider its policy of renewing Trident?

Do you think the UK has the right to bomb or send its armed forces into other countries, whether that is with or without authorisation from the UN Security Council?

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

What is your view of the arms trade? Should the UK sell weapons to other countries?

Find out more

- www.quaker.org.uk/disarm

The Britain Yearly Meeting staff member is Tim Wallis: disarm@quaker.org.uk.

Other organisations working on Trident and providing useful information include:

- Scottish CND: www.banthebomb.org
- WMD Awareness Group: www.wmdawareness.org.uk
- Rethink Trident: www.rethinktrident.org.uk
- BASIC: www.basicint.org

Housing and community justice

Photo: Quaker Housing Trust



Housing

We welcome the Scottish government's decision to rescind Right to Buy, and encourage further investment in genuinely affordable housing. Housing is more than merely a financial investment; it is an integral element of social and economic justice. Secure and appropriate accommodation is essential for people to create a home in which to thrive. People should be able to afford the housing they need, whether or not they are in receipt of housing benefit, or whether they are renting or buying their home. We have a collective responsibility for housing our population, who are our neighbours.

Questions for candidates

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

How do you think Scotland can best support stable and healthy communities?

Inequality of housing opportunity is one of the biggest gulfs in our society. What do you suggest might be done to improve matters?

How might ethics be applied to housing?

Community justice

Quakers in Scotland welcome the formal commitments that the Scottish government has made to reduce the use of imprisonment, especially for women offenders, and to redesign and improve its "community justice" services. We would like to see open debate and cross-party support for the effort needed to make these plans a reality. At a time of falling crime, policymakers can afford to be

bold. We have long advocated the use of restorative justice because it seeks to balance the needs, rights and interests of both victims and offenders, and we would like to see it used more widely.

We welcome the tentative beginnings of Circles of Support and Accountability (a project working to reduce sex offending), and encourage their further development.

Questions for candidates

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

What are your views on restorative justice and its use in the criminal justice system?

Do you support the development of Circles of Support and Accountability?

Climate and energy justice, land reform

Climate and energy justice

Quakers in Scotland are calling for an economy and energy system that does not rely on fossil fuels. The Scottish government continues to support anti-environment measures such as cutting Air Passenger Duty and building new motorways, while it has missed its ambitious climate change targets for several years. The power of fossil fuel companies is insufficiently regulated, despite the Climate Change Act committing the UK government to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050. The clean up of environmental waste produced by fossil fuel companies is largely subsidised by the state. Although there is still a moratorium on fracking, this is not the same as a

commitment to continue to oppose fracking.

Many people in Scotland still suffer from fuel poverty, and continued reliance on fossil fuels will affect the poorest most. Everyone has the right to energy that is both affordable and does not harm the earth. We want a transition to a sustainable energy system and economy.

Any system should be fair for people and fair for the earth, creating green jobs and providing affordable low-carbon energy for all.

Questions for candidates

How would you ensure that policy in Scotland assists in meeting climate change targets?

What steps do you believe could be taken to further reduce fuel poverty in Scotland?

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

A Quaker response to the crisis of climate change, 2009



Photo: Ellis Brooks for Britain Yearly Meeting



Photo: Brookie / Wikipedia

Land reform

Land is more than a resource; it binds communities together, providing a home and a sense of place. Recent legislation in the Scottish Parliament has aimed to clarify how land can be used in the public interest, and has raised questions about who owns land and how communities can access land.

Questions for candidates

How would you ensure that the benefits of land are available to everyone, not just the few?

Social security and welfare

With the richest 20 per cent of the population owning approximately 100 times the wealth of the poorest 20 per cent, the UK is one of the most unequal societies in the industrialised world.

Controversial social security cuts made by the UK government in Westminster have helped shape the debate around austerity in Scotland.

Our Quaker commitment to community means we have a responsibility to respect and care for all. Yet benefit delays, sanctions, and cuts are driving people to food banks. 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 in paid work. If the UK government is passing legislation which further damages our social security safety net, we must ask the Scottish government what it will do to mitigate the effects and soften the impact.

Evidence shows that more equal societies are better for everyone. We could press for a more explicit political recognition of the harm, instability, and wasted opportunity engendered by high levels of economic inequality. With our Quaker testimony to equality as a starting point, we believe that narrowing the gap between the rich and the rest should be a political priority for Scotland.

“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



Photo: Sunniva Taylor for Britain Yearly Meeting

Questions for candidates

What role can and should the Scottish Parliament play in bringing about greater economic equality? What would you do if elected?

What would you do to help ensure food banks become unnecessary?

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

The Scottish Parliament has the power to set a higher tax rate than in the rest of the UK. Would you support higher rates of income tax if this would enable smaller reductions in benefits for the worst off?

What can meetings do?

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 initial suggestions.

Offer a cup of tea

Do you worship in the centre of a busy town or city, where many people pass the 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 thoughts on politics. Talk to them about Quaker values, without suggesting that they must support any party in particular.

Write to your candidates

Interested in writing to the 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. If you are writing as a meeting, please ask your clerk to sign the letter. Approach all the candidates, not just those you may agree with.

Photo: © 2010 Mike Pinches



Hold a hustings

A hustings is when all the candidates are invited to answer questions from the audience. All candidates must be invited unless there are so many candidates that the event would be impracticable, in which case those least likely to win may be excluded. Please see the hustings briefing at www.quakervote.org.uk 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. A panel discussion is similar, but focused on a specific subject and without any candidates on the panel (even if one candidate happens to be an expert!).

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 any of the subjects raised in this guide, or other issues, such as whether the UK should leave the EU. Think about speaking to groups and organisations in your wider community.

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. Please do let us know what you're planning so that we can share it with others.

“Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.”

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This guide forms part of the election resources produced by Quakers in Scotland for the 2016 election. To find out more about particular topics or get involved in events, visit www.quakervote.org.uk.

You can also follow @quakervote or email quakervote@quaker.org.uk.

Contact Mairi Campbell-Jack, Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer for Quakers in Britain, at mairic@quaker.org.uk or call 07419 991 246.

For a large-print edition of this document please contact publications@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1162.



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