

Since we last reported to General Meeting in November 2024, the Working Group has continued to work to further the Quaker testimonies of peace, equality and justice, seeking growing points to bring about a just and compassionate society. We recognise that the inequalities and inadequacies in our society contribute hugely to the violence within it, the harms done and offences committed.

1. Where we are in relation to the objectives of the Working Group (with inevitable overlaps):

(i) To facilitate the work of the SQCJN, as a body linked to GM:

We have sought to work more closely with the Network, to ensure better consultation, and particularly to give members of the Network opportunities to feed into the documents which the Working Group has produced. We are grateful to Martin Mansell for coordinating the monthly meetings of the wider network and to Ren Wednesday for writing excellent notes on the discussions.

Mike Nellis's talk on giving evidence to the Sentencing Commission in a personal capacity, was a network highlight in October and there are two interesting talks planned: Angela Collins on Women in prisons and the effect on their children (November 2025) and Laura Emmererson and a colleague from Childrens and Young People Centre for Justice will talk on Restorative Justice (December 2025).

(ii) To provide initial input and regular (at least annual) feedback to GM on the work of the SQCJN, keeping Scottish Quakers informed on community justice issues:

Soon after last year's GM report in November 2024 we held a successful online (Zoom) event during "Prisoners Week" primarily for Quakers based in Scotland. This involved Ben Jarman (2024 Swarthmore lecturer) answering questions, followed by talks from Maggie Chapman MSP, Green Party Spokesperson on criminal justice (Aberdeen Quaker attendee) and Mike Nellis (Working Group and Network member).

(iii) To represent GM in communicating discerned Quaker views on community justice issues to other bodies and to the Scottish public:

We are grateful to Bob Mandeville for working very closely with the Scottish Prison Chaplaincy in planning "Prisoners Week" events. He has organised this year a Zoom event on 19th November. It will be open to everyone in Scotland, and we hope it will provide a useful addition to the conversation about justice in our country. We are pleased that the Very Reverend Andrew McLellan (a former moderator of the Church of Scotland and former Chief Inspector of Prisons) will chair the session. The Howard League for Penal Reform and Kate Philbrick will approach the need for penal reform from different perspectives. The flier for this event is attached to this report. The ensuing discussions will give an opportunity for all attending to have space for reflection and to shine a light on how justice can be delivered compassionately with a more creative and appropriate response to crime. We feel offering quiet spaces is maybe Quakers' greatest gift.

Although not a directly organised SCJWG or SQCJN event, many of us attended a delayed Quaker Week launch of the book about the Barlinnie Special Unit on October 22nd, hosted by Alastair Macintosh at the Gal Gael Foundation. The speakers were Mike Nellis, who was a

significant contributor and supporter in the production of the book; Dan Gunn, who was a prison Governor at the unit; Karen McCluskey, CEO of Community Justice Scotland; and Sarah Treveleyan, a co-writer and a psychiatrist who later married Jimmy Boyle. This was followed by questions and discussion. The publication of the book, 'The Barlinnie Special Unit: Art, Punishment and Innovation', marks 30 years since the inspirational therapeutic unit closed in Scotland. Sadly, this leaves us now with no models of therapeutic prison communities in Scotland.

We are working on a presentation/document which we hope will be helpful to all Quakers - see below.

(iv) To work closely with the Parliamentary Engagement Officer where community justice matters arise in the Scottish Parliament, always ensuring that such advocacy reflects Quaker positions and priorities which have been appropriately discerned by GM. This will be aided by communication between the convenors of the 2 groups at least twice a year to inform each other of advocacy opportunities which arise and agree possible actions which may involve work by the Parliamentary Engagement Officer, depending on priorities and capacity:

We have enjoyed successful liaison with the PEWG and their engagement officer, who has also alerted us to consultations and events. In particular, we have written briefings for the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, as well as a more general briefing setting out the need for more compassionate and restorative responses to crime and community approaches that could dramatically reduce imprisonment.

The PEWG arranged meetings with both the Labour Party and the SNP where we were able to feed into their preparations for their election manifestos.

We also made an extensive submission to the Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission.

As a result of responding so often to consultations, we felt it would be helpful if we created a simple document which we could share with Quakers, the public, policy makers and others, setting out our vision. Currently this is a short presentation and will ultimately also be a 5 page leaflet. We are grateful to QIS for our budget which allows us to pay Ren Wednesday for excellent layout and editing support.

Our current title is; *Changing How We Respond to Crime in Scotland, from a Quaker Perspective. Re-imagining society as fairer, more caring, forgiving and compassionate.*

Themes are:

1. Prisons aren't working, our overcrowded prisons have social and financial costs.
2. There are effective and restorative humanising alternatives to prison and other ways of delivering justice.
3. Alternatives to (over-) imprisonment works elsewhere - why not in Scotland?
4. We need to consider social justice, our communities, and the causes of crime. Crime is a community issue, not just something about the offender.
5. How can Scotland change now?
Scotland has a track record of change.
6. The Quaker perspective.

(v) To work to support interfaith chaplaincy within the justice system in ways which seem most helpful:

Bob Mandeville has taken the lead on Quaker involvement in Prisoners Week. Quakers supported the launch of the week in Perth last year and will again be supporting this year's Prisoners Week with the theme of *Crossroads .Where Next ?*

We have been glad to continue our dialogue with the Chaplaincy advisors and are now jointly planning a retreat day for facilitator chaplains in late November at Glasgow Meeting house on the theme of Sanctuary. We hope this will be nourishing for them in these difficult times for anyone involved in the prison setting.

Following our successful retreats for chaplains last year, three of the Working Group have been going into HMP Addiewell to support the chaplain there. He has brought together a group of "elders", who are prisoners who work to support other prisoners. We have what is notionally a Creative Listening Session. These groups are sometimes almost completely silent and sometimes have contributions or discussions before or after. Those of us who go feel we learn so much from these men who are living such confined lives, and we hope that our offer of silent acceptance and peace in their noisy world is helpful. The strapline for our document about penal change came from one of the men who attend the group.

We would also like to offer this to other prisons who felt this would be helpful.

(vi) To facilitate more active engagement of interested Quakers into the working of the Scottish Criminal Justice system, e.g. prison visiting, alternatives to custody:

We cannot see where this is going just now:

Should there be more demand for groups such as the one in HMP Addiewell, we hope Quakers more widely may want to support this.

We are hopeful that the government is renewing its commitment to restorative justice and that there may be more opportunities for Quakers to be involved in this.

2.The Working Group itself

The membership of the Group was enhanced by the addition of Mike Nellis and Chris Holman who joined us at the start of the year, and both have made significant contributions to our work. In September Mike Nellis was released from his service to focus on his personal professional work, his commitment to the SQCJ Network and the UK wide Quakers in Criminal Justice. We hope to continue to work constructively with him in these roles.

We have had more in-person meetings this year and this has been beneficial in establishing relationships and trying to work through our agendas. Inevitably being responsive to external demands and having so much to do has also meant we have had many *ad hoc* meetings too; some by Zoom and some in person. With our Zoom event coming up and the extensive work we have put into writing too we hope we are furthering Quaker concerns. We hope that Scottish Quakers will accept this brief report of what the Working Group has been doing and engage with us in considering these matters. We need help from all Quakers in changing the prevailing punitive approach to offending.

3. Orders for Lifelong restriction Update

We note that in March 2024, we gave advice to General Meeting on Orders for Lifelong Restriction as being comparable but not the same as the Imprisonment for Public Protection sentences which Meeting for Suffering had considered. Although originally we advised "At this stage we do not recommend that Scottish Quakers should prioritise the revocation of the OLR legalisation; we would align with other organisations highlighting operational or procedural

issues with OLRs should these arise,” we note that there has now been some concern about their application. We are aware of the psychological impact of indeterminate sentences, and the limited employment opportunities for offenders released on indeterminate sentences, particularly with the experience of living under the threat of recall. This is similar to the issues faced with IPP sentence in England. Balanced against this we reflect that without indeterminate sentences and opportunities for release, which are deemed to be able to be safely managed, sentencers might impose even longer determinate sentences. Therefore, currently the SQCJWG cannot definitively oppose indeterminate sentences; we should continue to monitor the situation and include this issue in the broader debate about the future of sentencing.

Working group members:

Andrew Collins, Jenny Copsey, Chris Holman, Anneke Kraakman, Bob Mandeville, Kate Philbrick