

Quakers in Scotland Parliamentary Engagement 2024



Dear Friends,

At the start of 2025, I am taking a moment to look back and reflect on the work that the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG) and I undertook on your behalf in 2024.

I have continued this year to be encouraged by all that Friends in Scotland are doing to have a kinder voice heard amidst (what can often be) heated voices in a parliamentary context. Although there have been louder voices out there often arguing against our priorities, or a silent 'sweeping under the rug' of other issues, the calm, firm Quaker call for honest, truth and integrity continues to strike a chord and testify to what is right.

Every three years, Friends in Scotland help to discern our priorities for engaging with the Scottish Parliament. This consultation helps ensure the work of the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG) remains grounded in the concerns and leadings of our Quaker community. As our current three-year period of work concludes in December 2025, we are seeking your guidance on where we should focus our efforts for 2026-2028. Over the next few months, Carolyn and Richard (the co-conveners of PEWG) and I will go out to the Area Meetings to discuss what our next three-year period of work should look like, before taking a proposal to GM in November. I look forward to engaging with you as part of this process!

As part of my role, I maintain an occasional mailing list for those who would like to be kept abreast of opportunities which arise for engaging with our representatives in relation to our identified parliamentary priorities. It is so encouraging to see this being shared and people taking action as a result – I love to hear from you about how you're engaging with parliamentarians. If you're not yet on the 'parliamentary engagement opportunities' email list and would like to be, please do email me at sarahk@quaker.org.uk and I'll add you.

Peacebuilding

Peace Education

Work on peace education has continued apace, building on the [event](#) and [exhibition](#) in Parliament in September 2024. Ellis Brooks from Quakers in Britain continues to do a lot of work with other groups in Scotland who care about peace and global citizenship education.

As part of this group, we wrote to Education Cabinet Secretary Jenny Gilruth, setting out arguments in favour of peace education and calling for the incorporation of peace education into the curriculum. She responded very helpfully, putting us in touch with key people to speak with on curriculum potential for peace education and related approaches.

Following on from this, in October Ellis and I, together with allies from Christian Aid and Peace Education Scotland met with two key representatives of Education Scotland (ES – the improvement agency for Scottish education). Those present recognised the importance of peace education and its links to various different parts of the curriculum, including RME,

Learning for Sustainability, social sciences, and health and wellbeing. This is particularly so in the context of global conflict as well as reports of poor classroom behaviour.

The meeting came at a good time, and Ellis was then invited to be a 'critical friend' in discussions about the 2030-2040 curriculum and he and others from our networks were able to emphasise the importance of peace education.

It is so encouraging to see that Quaker Peace Education thinking is now part of the conversation in Scotland.

Arms Industry Funding

Throughout 2024, PEWG and some other interested Friends engaged in significant dialogue with Scottish Enterprise (SE) regarding their public funding of arms manufacturers. We focused our work on examining SE's £300 million annual investment program and its continued support of companies like Thales, Raytheon, and Leonardo, despite these companies' links to countries with documented human rights violations.

Building on earlier meetings with the Minister for Trade, we had a discussion with senior SE officials in June. We raised concerns about Scottish public money supporting arms manufacturers and explored the environmental impact of military carbon emissions ("carbon footprint") in relation to SE's net zero commitments. While SE confirmed they don't directly support munitions manufacturing, we highlighted our concerns about how even ring-fenced funding supports companies with human rights risks and questioned whether such companies truly need public funding when green industry transition is urgent.

Our discussions revealed ongoing challenges. SE demonstrated commitment to helping businesses transition to green economy manufacturing, requiring net zero action plans from funded companies. However, their focus remains solely on operational emissions rather than downstream impacts. The political context, has shown the SNP's continued support for defence manufacturing in Scotland, with Ministers citing global instability and NATO obligations. In response, we continue our advocacy work, collaborating with Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) and other allies to push for more stringent human rights checks and joined-up thinking in relation to public funding and climate spending.

Scottish Peace Institute

Following much earlier work on the matter of a Peace Institute, the Government announced in the summer that it was tendering for a 'Peace Platform' pilot, to be delivered by an organisation or coalition which would also manage Women in Conflict Fellowships. The winning bidder has not yet been announced, but we're in contact with the civil servants working in this area to ensure that relevant Quaker groups are able to have a voice in the pilot.

Human rights

Unfortunately the Human Rights (Scotland) Bill which we were expecting to come out this year has been subject to delay. We have called with other groups such as the Human Rights Consortium, for preparatory work on the Bill to continue, building on the consultation that was undertaken in 2023.

Climate and economic justice

Health and Climate event

Spearheaded by Friend Lesley Morrison following her Time for Reflection in April 2023, the 'Health and Climate' event which we put on in March 2024 was a big success. The event gave MSPs the opportunity to consider that steps to mitigate the climate crisis will bring significant positive benefits not just for planetary health but for individual patient health. MSPs were encouraged to look at all decision the Parliament makes through the lens of climate and health.

Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport Maree Todd took the time to attend and spoke about the importance that the Scottish Government places on reducing the health service's emissions and enabling Scots to live productive and healthy lives. Other speakers included Friend Martin Pippard, Pete Ritchie from Nourish Scotland, Bridget Bradley (an eco-anxiety researcher), and Isabelle (giving a young person's perspective). MSPs were given an [information pack](#) to reinforce this message and provide resources for them to respond to their constituents' queries on the topics of climate and health.

The event sparked a lot of interest by MSPs and we were able to speak both to those who had attended, and arrange catch-up meetings with some of the MSPs who were prevented on the night.

Speaking out for truth and integrity

I have continued to be an active member of the political advocacy group in Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS). As part of SCCS I have commented on several consultation responses to ensure that the importance of truth and integrity in climate matters is emphasised. We continue to have an important voice in speaking uncomfortable truths to power, as a lot of inflated hopes have been placed in carbon capture and storage and hydrogen playing a major part in Scotland's energy policy.

Promoting loss and damage funding

We have also been working with Christian Aid in relation to the importance of loss and damage funding, and together asked Sarah Boyack MSP to submit a [motion](#) on the need for climate justice at COP29, which 10 MSPs signed in support of. As the budget continues to be tight, it is important to explore innovative sources of funding which can ensure that those who pollute are those who pay for the consequential damage.

In this regard we have exchanged several letters with Acting Cabinet Secretary for Climate Gillian Martin, who seems to recognise the importance of loss and damage funding, particularly that it should be in the form of grants not loans. We will be calling for further loss and damage commitments from the Scottish Parliament from 2026 onwards, and encouraging the Scottish Government to seek to influence the UK Government on this issue.

Land reform

In May, I worked with a number of Friends across Scotland who have specialist knowledge of land reform issues, and together we collaborated on a [response to the Call for Views in the Land Reform Bill](#). In our response, we highlighted in particular the need to go forward with justice and equality as cornerstones, and to consider the issue from our children's and grandchildren's perspective: how can we shape a country and planet that they can thrive in? We called on the government to give local communities a true voice, free up land from

private ownership, and ensure land uses uphold the common wealth of all people and reverence for the natural world.

We also conveyed our belief in the importance of community: listening well to each other; continuing to find ways forward amidst tension and disagreement; and having space for everyone to be involved. Land reform matters because it helps to re-embed people into their communities of place, centring us as a nation. Land reform is about more than access to building plots, renewable energy, space for entrepreneurial activity, etc. It is about what it means to become a society in which the potential of its people(s) is more fully realised.

We are glad to see the steps forward contained in this Bill, but continue to call upon the Scottish Government to go further in reforming how Scotland's land is held and used.

Times for Reflection

As part of Quaker witness, individual Quakers have the opportunity to offer a Time for Reflection to open the Scottish Parliament. Contributions are sought from different faith groups (and those of no faith), and it is a nice way to interact with MSPs and provide them some food for thought as they start the business in the Chamber each week. Last year, Friend Mark Bitel gave some thoughts on the theme of the [importance of integrity](#); and Friend Sila Collins-Walden offered some words on [Interfaith Work](#) in December.

We've had a really good run of contributions from Friends, and invite you to consider whether you might have a short thought to share with MSPs? Listening or reading to past submissions may help spark some inspiration and ideas for what to say, and Richard Raggett has some guidelines to help you structure your talk.

The PEWG and I work on your behalf on the priorities agreed by you through GM discernment, and hope that this coming year you will be able to participate in the discernment process for the next 3 year set of priorities.

The PEWG currently includes: Richard Raggett and Carolyn Burch (NSAM; Co-Convenors), Ed Tyler (WSAM), Gareth Rae and Carol Jennings (SESAM), and Tanya Jones (ESAM). If you would like to find out more about how we work and what we are doing, please get in touch with us. Click [here](#) for copies of our consultation responses, statements and information about our other work.

In Friendship,

Sarah Komashko

Parliamentary Engagement officer