

Contacting your MP

a guide for Quakers

This is a resource for Quakers and other people campaigning for positive change. It will help you to decide on an approach, contact your MP if appropriate, and engage with them further when they respond.



Contacting your MP

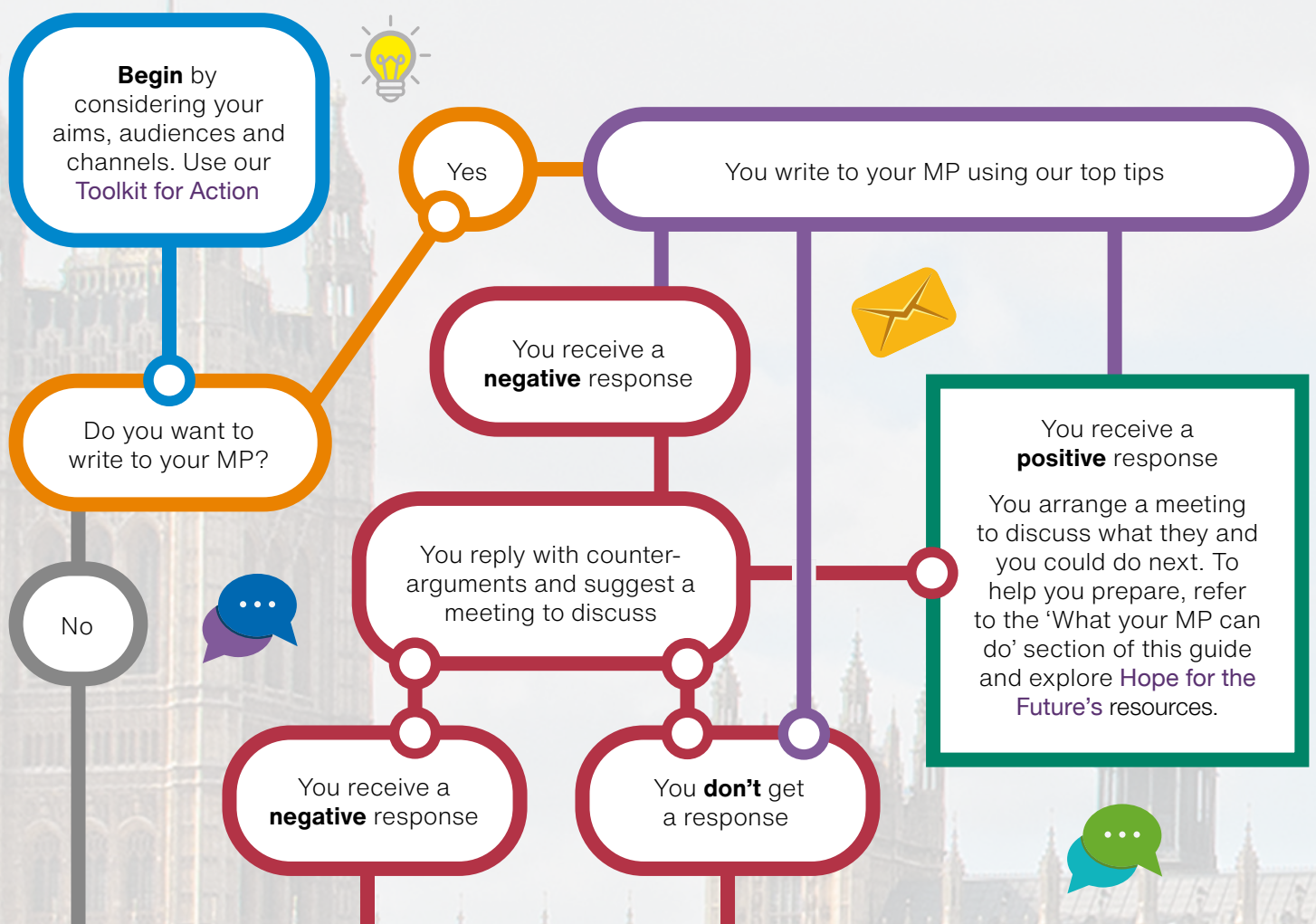
Introduction

This is a briefing on how to contact your Member of Parliament (MP). They could help you to raise awareness of a political issue or to change a policy or legislation.

A total of 650 MPs are elected to the House of Commons. Each MP represents an area of the UK containing an average of 75,000 voters. Some MPs represent parts of densely populated urban areas, while others represent geographically large but sparsely populated rural constituencies.

In Scotland and Wales, some powers are devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament respectively. If you live in Scotland or Wales and your issue is related to a devolved matter, you may wish to write to your Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) or Member of the Senedd (MS). If your issue is purely local, your local councillors may have more influence.

Find your national and local politicians at www.writetothem.com.



Ask yourself three questions:

- 1. Are there any other groups working on the same issue**, e.g. other faith groups or charities, trades unions, or public bodies? Can you work with them? Are stakeholders such as your MP more likely to listen to them? You can use this [Social speedometer](#) to help you find allies.
- 2. Are there any other key decision-makers/influencers you could target**, e.g. councillors (use our [guide to local government](#)), peers, civil servants, celebrities or journalists?
- 3. Is there another way you could catch your MP's attention**, aside from writing to them? Could you stage a public protest, gather a petition, go to the press ([toolkit](#)), start a social media campaign ([toolkit](#)), or attend a surgery? The [Beautiful Rising toolbox](#) may help you plan your activity.

Top tips for an effective email or letter

1. Do your research

Find out your MP's background, views and interests before you contact them. This will help you phrase your email or letter in a way that will grab their attention and encourage them to respond positively.

At www.theyworkforyou.com you can find MPs' voting records and view their recent appearances in Parliament to see the issues they tend to speak about. Their website and Twitter feed will also give you clues about their views and interests.



Ruth Cadbury MP meeting Quakers and others during a mass lobby about climate change.

2. Make it timely

Try to choose a time when the MP will be thinking about the issue you're writing about. For example, if there is a debate coming up in Parliament about your issue, write about a week before the debate providing points and facts they could raise.

3. Be clear and concise

Your MP is more likely to take action as a result of your email or letter if you make your point clearly and concisely. And if you have a request, include it near the start.

4. Strike the right tone

It's easy to appear to accidentally make assumptions about an MP's view, or to appear to be asserting your own view without considering their experience. A deliberately careful and measured tone can often work better.



Diane Abbott MP meeting representatives from Quakers in Britain and Women for Refugee Women.

5. Add a personal touch

Tell your MP why you care about the issue. If you can, briefly share a personal story or a case study of someone else's experience (with their permission). If your MP is a person of faith, they may respond positively to you saying how your Quaker faith leads you to act.

Generic campaign emails can be a useful way of showing an MP that a large number of their constituents care about a particular issue. But if you want a tailored response, take the time to write a tailored email.

6. Write the right amount

Writing to your MP is a good way to build a relationship, and a slow and steady correspondence can sometimes change opinions. Try not to write more than once a month. MPs receive a lot of correspondence and can start to ignore someone who writes too often.

Some practicalities

- Include your address in your email or letter so that your MP knows you live in their constituency. They can only help you if you're a constituent or if you're contacting them on behalf of a national organisation.
- You can also write to your MP as a meeting. Take a look at our advice on [Speaking out as Quakers](#).
- The vast majority of correspondence to an MP is read by their staff. By making your email or letter personal, with a clear request, you will increase the chances of it actually reaching your MP.

What your MP can do

Here are some ways your MP can help you with your campaign.

Ask a PQ

A parliamentary question (PQ) is when an MP or peer asks the government a question. They can be **written** or **oral**. PQs are a good way of finding out information the government hasn't published yet, or of drawing attention to a specific issue. Your MP may be willing to put down a question you've drafted for them. Take a look at previous examples to make sure you get the format right.

Connect you with others

Your MP may be able to connect you with other MPs and key stakeholders. Can they introduce you to a relevant minister or shadow minister? Or to other MPs or organisations who care about the same things? Can they put you in touch with staff in government, Parliament or political parties who are working on your issue?



Hold your local council accountable

If you are lobbying your local council on a local issue, your MP may be able to help you hold the council accountable. Is your local council required or committed to take action on something but hasn't? Ask your MP to write to them for an update.

Introduce legislation

MPs can introduce **Private Members' Bills** (PMBs). They usually only become law if the government supports them, but they can be a good way of drawing attention to an issue. **Ten Minute Rule Bills** are a type of PMB.

Your MP is most likely to be successful in changing UK law if they convince the government that a new **Public Bill** is needed.

Media and social media

Your MP can raise the profile of your issue in the media and on social media. Help them as much as possible by providing them with template press releases and social media posts. You can find out more in our media and social media **toolkits**.

Propose an amendment

MPs can propose changes to legislation that is going through Parliament. As with PMBs, the **amendment** is much more likely to be passed if the government agrees with it. So it's crucial to try to persuade the government and the governing party's MPs of the merits of your cause. You can brief MPs ahead of debates and votes.

Propose an inquiry

Some MPs sit on **Select Committees**, and most sit on a number of **All-Party Parliamentary Groups** (APPGs). They may be able to propose that their committee conducts an inquiry into the issue you care about. At the very least, they may be able to raise the issue with other members of their committee, or invite you to speak at one of the committee's meetings.

Table an EDM

Early Day Motions (EDMs) are a way for MPs to draw attention to a specific issue and put their views on record. Once you have persuaded an MP to table an EDM, you can ask other MPs to sign it. A lot of MPs don't sign EDMs, though.

Table or contribute to a debate

MPs can propose **adjournment debates** and **Westminster Hall debates** directly. They can also suggest debate topics via the **Backbench Business Committee**. Opposition parties can choose topics for debate on **Opposition days**. All of these are good ways for MPs to raise an issue in Parliament and get a response from the government. If your MP is speaking in a debate, you can provide them with a briefing suggesting key points they might want to raise.

If you have any questions or would like to share your experience of campaigning, please contact politics@quaker.org.uk.

For further resources, visit www.quaker.org.uk/politics.



Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Registered charity number 1127633

Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ

Follow us on social media @BritishQuakers.

Email us at politics@quaker.org.uk

www.quaker.org.uk

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