

Getting involved in the European Parliament Elections 2014

The Quaker Council for European Affairs British Committee has put together this information pack for Local and Area Meetings.

The EU plays a major role in the lives of over 500 million citizens in its 28 Member States. It isn't perfect, but it is a strong democratic institution – one of history's great achievements. We would like to invite you, as Quakers, to do something to push against Euro-apathy and help get the vote out on 22 May 2014.

Turnout in the UK for European elections is low as a rule: less than 35% in 2009. Many people in the UK don't care much for the EU, as far as they know anything about it, and ignorance of what the EU does is widespread. The UK holds itself apart from aspects of the EU that many other Member States embrace – the single currency, the Schengen agreement on travel, the working time directive, among others.

Successive British governments have failed to explain the real virtues of EU membership to voters. This has created space for all the myths and legends about unelected Commissioners and corrupt MEPs, banana straightness regulations, and allegedly intrusive constitutional revisions. UK politicians are said to 'go native' when they get to Brussels, as though Europe wasn't home to British people as well as anyone else.

Bad governments are made by good people who don't vote. The EU is a consensual organisation and aims to encourage equality. But extremist parties take advantage of low turnouts, and the possibility of them acquiring disproportionate democratic legitimacy should impel anyone interested in fairness and democracy to want to encourage a high voter turnout. This way everyone's interests can be fairly represented.

The EU makes a difference

The EU is the most extensive peacebuilding project in history. As well as eliminating conflict between Member States since its foundation in the wake of the second world war, the EU is the world's largest provider of international development aid – €900 million in 2013.

As a regulated trading bloc the EU is potentially a force for good in areas like workers' rights, migrant labour and corporate social responsibility. Companies in Europe have cleaned up their acts both in relation to domestic labour practices and also their global supply chains.

The EU is the major force in the world working for climate change mitigation. Challenging targets for CO2 reduction – 20% by 2020 – have been agreed and set by governments and industries. Key components of this are regulation and enforcement, with a long term strategy to reduce dependency on unsustainable ways of living and working.

This pack of information includes the following material:

- A one-page guide to the institutions and processes of the EU to give information on what you are voting for on 22 May.
- A map of European Parliament constituencies – and corresponding BYM areas – with an outline of the voting and registration process, to give you information on how to vote on 22 May.
- Some guidance on how to use this material, including organising meetings and contacts with candidates, to give you information on finding out who to vote for.

How to use this material

Raise awareness within the meeting

This material comes to you from the Quaker Council of European Affairs (QCEA) and its British Committee: you may want to mention it in the regular announcements space at the end of Meeting for Worship.

Make the one-page guide to the EU institutions available widely in the meeting. Refer to the map of constituencies and identify the BYM area and local meetings in your constituency.

Get in contact with other Meetings or other groups to assess the interest in some joint activity in the constituency. This could be an open meeting in the form of a candidates' debate, an invitation to candidates to address Friends, a coordinated emailing of questions to candidates (and distribution of the responses), for example.

Organise a candidates' debate

Arrange a venue and a date and contact the candidates to invite them to an open meeting. How open depends on you: if you can pack a meeting with Friends, good: more likely the meeting will be a local event open to all.

Contact all the candidates (not just the mainstream parties or the ones Quakers are likely to support) and invite them to a meeting where they can give an outline of their party's platform and take questions from the audience. The BBC Question Time programme is a good format to adopt. Find someone to chair the meeting who will (ideally) keep things under control with some good humour. Candidates should welcome a public platform: it's what politics is about. If some candidates refuse to take part, tell them about others who will be there.

Run the event. Make sure your local/ regional media contacts know about it: an event run by Quakers may be a new angle for them and could lead to some

good coverage for the event itself and the Society of Friends.

For more advice on how to hold a hustings, go to www.electoralcommission.org.uk and search for "hustings".

If you don't want to organise a debate consider polling the candidates with a list of questions, and collecting the answers together for information, dissemination or publication.

Questions on issues of Quaker concern

Ask the candidates questions about issues which matter to you. For example, you could start with:

- Role of the EU, parties' attitude to EU functions, UK relations with the rest of the EU
- Security, counter-terrorism, disarmament, relations with USA
- Economic development, regional policies, migration, labour rights
- Environment policy, climate change mitigation, emissions targets, sustainability
- Development aid, relations with Russia and Ukraine, Turkey, Israel/ Palestine, the Middle East

Spread the word

Talk to your relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues about the EP elections. How much do they know? Are they planning to vote? Would they like to know more about the EU in general and the local candidates in particular?

Candidates will provide you with information material about their policies. Spread them around.

Getting the vote out on 22 May

Make sure you know where to vote and whether anyone you know needs encouragement or a lift to the polling station...

Some additional questions and areas of concern

- The Parliament has to approve the EU budget. Are there any areas of potential difficulty? For example in recent years the European Parliament has approved budgets that included funding for the development of armed drones.
- There is a major trade agreement between the EU and US currently being negotiated called TTIP. Most MEP candidates are in favour of the agreement, but there has been coverage in the media about the risks of corporations being able to take states to court to challenge national regulation of products. Do candidates support a sunset clause that will make it easier to remove this Trade deal once negotiated?
- There is a climate summit in Paris next year at which the EU will have to decide whether it is going to reinforce or dilute its 2030 package of green policies.
- What do candidates think the EU's role in the world should be? The EU currently supports civilian peace missions in different parts of the world, but some MEP candidates think we should spend less on aid and civilian peace in parts of the world suffering from conflict.

Finding out more

QCEA: www.qcea.org

European Parliament: www.europarl.org.uk

Conservative Party: www.conservatives.com

Green Party: www.greenparty.org.uk

Labour Party: www.labour.org.uk

Liberal Democrat Party: www.libdems.org.uk

Plaid Cymru: www.plaidcymru.org

SNP: www.snp.org

UKIP: www.ukip.org

The Electoral Commission: www.electoralcommission.org.uk and www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Britain Yearly Meeting

Area Meetings by European Region and MEPs for 2009–2014

How are MEPs elected?

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected by a closed list system.

Each political party puts forward a list of candidates for each regional constituency. You, the voter, vote for one of these party lists, or for an independent candidate. You cannot vote for a candidate who is part of a political party list – you can only vote for the list. The votes are counted up by political party. The number of candidates who are elected from each party represents the share of the vote each party receives.

For example:

Imagine that Jill, John and James are standing for the J Party in the North East. Jill is first on the J Party's list, and James is last. Barry, Betty and Bea are standing for the B Party in the North East. Barry is first on the B Party's list, and Bea is last. The North East elects three MEPs.

Now imagine that the J Party receives 33% of the vote, and the B Party receives 67% of the vote. Jill becomes an MEP, because the J Party have enough votes for one MEP and she is first on the J Party's list. Barry and Betty both become MEPs, because the B Party have enough votes for two MEPs and they are first and second on the B Party's list.

In order to vote in the elections, you must be registered to vote with your local council. To find out how to register to vote, go to www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Which regional constituency is my Quaker Meeting in?

The UK is divided into twelve constituencies, representing Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or a region of England. Different regions elect different numbers of MEPs. See the table below for Area Meetings by constituency (on the right hand side) and their MEPs for 2009-2014 (left hand side)

Constituency	MEPs (2009-2014)	Party
East Midlands		Conservative
Northamptonshire Area Quaker Meeting	2	
Lincolnshire Area Quaker Meeting	1	Independent
Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Area Quaker Meeting	1	Labour
Leicester Area Quaker Meeting	1	Liberal Democrats
	1	UKIP

Constituency	MEPs (2009-2014)	Party
Eastern		Conservative
Hertford and Hitchin Area Quaker Meeting	2	
Chilterns Area Quaker Meeting	1	Labour
Luton & Leighton Area Quaker Meeting		Liberal Democrats
Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting	1	
Ipswich & Diss Area Quaker Meeting	1	UKIP
Thaxted Area Quaker Meeting		
Mid Essex Area Quaker Meeting		
Cambridgeshire Area Quaker Meeting		
Norfolk & Waveney Area Quaker Meeting		

Constituency	MEPs (2009-2014)	Party
London		Conservative
North London Area Quaker Meeting	1	
North West London Area Quaker Meeting	1	Green
Kingston & Wandsworth Area Quaker Meeting	2	Labour
South London Area Quaker Meeting	1	Liberal Democrats
North East Thames Area Quaker Meeting		UKIP
South East London Area Quaker Meeting		
London West Area Quaker Meeting	1	

Constituency	MEPs (2009-2014)	Party
West Midlands		
Staffordshire Area Quaker Meeting	2	Conservative
Central England Area Quaker Meeting	1	Labour
Hereford & Mid-Wales Area Quaker Meeting (Hereford)	1	Liberal Democrats
Worcestershire & Shropshire Area Quaker Meeting	2	Independent

Constituency	MEPs (2009-2014)	Party
North East		Conservative
Tees Valley Area Quaker Meeting	1	Labour
Northumbria Area Quaker Meeting	1	Liberal Democrats

Constituency	MEPs (2009-2014)	Party
North West		Conservative
North Cumbria Area Quaker Meeting	1	
West Cumbria Area Quaker Meeting	2	Labour
East Cheshire Area Quaker Meeting	1	Liberal Democrats
Manchester & Warrington Area Quaker Meeting	1	UKIP
Hardshaw and Mann Area Quaker Meeting		BNP
Pendle Hill Area Quaker Meeting		
Wirral & Chester Area Quaker Meeting		
Kendal & Sedbergh Area Quaker Meeting		
Lancashire Central & North Area Quaker Meeting		
Swarthmoor (South West Cumbria) Area Quaker Meeting	1	

Constituency	MEPs (2009-2014)	Party
Scotland		Labour
East Scotland Area Quaker Meeting		Liberal Democrats
North Scotland Area Quaker Meeting	1	
South East Scotland Area Quaker Meeting	1	Scottish Conservative
West Scotland Area Quaker Meeting	2	SNP

South East	♂ ♂	Conservative
Banbury & Evesham A Area Quaker Meeting	♂ ♂	
Mid-Thames Area Quaker Meeting	♂	Green
Oxford & Swindon Area Quaker Meeting (Oxford)		
Hampshire & Islands Area Quaker Meeting	♂	Labour
East Kent Area Quaker Meeting		Liberal Democrats
West Kent Area Quaker Meeting	♂ ♂	
Sussex West Area Quaker Meeting	♂	UKIP
West Weald Area Quaker Meeting		
Surrey & Hampshire Border Area Quaker Meeting		
Sussex East Area Quaker Meeting		

Wales	♂	Conservative
North Wales Area Quaker Meeting / Cyfarfod Crynwyr Rhanbarth Gogledd Cymru	♂	Labour
Hereford & Mid-Wales Area Quaker Meeting / Cyfarfod Rhanbarth (Mid-Wales)	♂	Plaid Cymru
South Wales Area Quaker Meeting / Cyfarfod Crynwyr Rhanbarth De Cymru		UKIP

Yorkshire and the Humber	♂	Conservative
Wensleydale & Swaledale Area Quaker Meeting	♂	Labour
Sheffield & Balby Area Quaker Meeting		Liberal Democrats
Brighouse West Yorkshire Area Meeting	♂ ♂	
Leeds Area Quaker Meeting	♂ ♂	Independent
Pickering & Hull Area Quaker Meeting		
Central Yorkshire Area Quaker Meeting		
Craven & Keighley Area Meeting		
York Area Quaker Meeting		

South West	♂ ♂	Conservative
Oxford & Swindon Area Quaker Meeting (Swindon)	♂	
Bristol Area Quaker Meeting		Liberal Democrats
Mid-Somerset Area Quaker Meeting	♂	
North Somerset & Wiltshire Area Quaker Meeting	♂ ♂	UKIP
Dorset & South Wiltshire Area Quaker Meeting		
West Somerset Area Quaker Meeting		
Cornwall Area Quaker Meeting		
Devon Area Quaker Meeting		
Bournemouth Coastal Area Quaker Meeting		
Gloucestershire Area Quaker Meeting		



The European Union in outline

- **The Council of the EU** contains ministerial representatives from each of the 28 Member State governments. It meets to discuss and ratify key policies. Finance ministers discuss the budget, trade ministers discuss trade policies, and prime ministers or presidents discuss EU-wide strategic issues. The Council is chaired on a rotating basis by each Member State for 6 months at a time (currently Greece).
- **The European Commission** is an executive council of 28 senior political figures nominated by Member States and appointed by the European Parliament to serve for 5 years. The Commission is supported by a multi-national group of 23,000 officials. The Commission is in charge of initiating, drafting and implementing EU legislation.
- **The European Parliament** has 766 Members (MEPs) directly elected every 5 years by the voters of the European Union. MEPs sit in political groups rather than as individual parties. The Parliament's role is to scrutinise the work of the Council and Commission, in debates and through a system of committees.

The Council and the Parliament make decisions about what the EU does and what EU law should be. About two thirds of these decisions (those relating to 'Community Policies') are made jointly by the Council and Parliament. The remaining decisions (relating to 'Common, Foreign and Security policies' or 'Justice and Home Affairs') are taken by the Council, and the Parliament is only consulted and informed. So on these issues the national governments of the Member States make the decisions.

The European Parliament elections

- In the UK the European Parliament elections take place on 22 May 2014.
- In May 2014 the United Kingdom will elect 73 MEPs (3 representing Northern Ireland)
- The UK is divided up into 12 regions. In each region there are between 3-10 MEPs who represent the people living in that region.
- Individuals vote for a party list or independent candidate standing in their region.

Each party puts forward a list of candidates for each region. This list is the party's order of preference for their candidates. The first candidate on the list gets elected first followed by the second and third candidates depending on the number of votes and so on. Each adult in Britain (apart from prisoners) has one vote. You can vote for one of the party's lists or for an independent individual in your region. The number of candidates that get elected from each party's regional list directly depends on the number of votes that each list gets.

UK Influence in Europe – your democratic rights

There are many ways in which British citizens can influence the EU. The Council and the Parliament are the key decision making bodies in the EU. So one way to influence the EU and get our voices heard is to approach either our national government ministers (directly or through our elected MPs) or our MEPs. There are also **citizens' initiatives** which allow people to call on the Commission to take action on issues if one million citizens from a significant number of EU Member States sign a petition calling for it.

The European Parliament's role is to represent the people of Europe. It is therefore, more than any other body, our voice in Europe. We directly elect the British MEPs to represent our views to the EU. We will have the opportunity to vote for a new European Parliament along with 350 million European Union voters on 22 May this year. If we don't like how the EU works we should tell our MEP candidates to try to change it, and if we want something done we should demand that they try to do it. Each individual vote counts – so use yours and make sure you vote on 22 May!