

Build back better

Quakers in Britain briefing for Friends, July 2020



At Quakers in Britain, we believe Friends have an important role in helping society to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We've worked with Friends to develop a Quaker vision for 'build back better'. It's grounded in our faith, and supported by centuries of experience putting our beliefs into action.

In this briefing we set out our vision for building back better in four interlinked areas. We need your help to spread the word. At the end of this briefing we suggest **10 ways** you can uphold and promote this vision both nationally and in your community.

1. A fairer, greener economy

Quakers are committed to equality and sustainability. The recovery from COVID-19 and the hosting of COP26 present opportunities to create a new economy in line with our values. But there is also a risk that we will rebuild our economy in a way that locks us into high-carbon mechanisms. We must avoid this, for people and planet.

As a member of the [Build Back Better](#) campaign, Quakers in Britain calls on the government to decarbonise the economy in a way that tackles inequality and enhances the lives of ordinary people. The need for a rapid and just transition to net zero must be at the heart of all spending decisions. This includes ending all [public financing of, and tax breaks for, fossil fuel projects](#).

It is vital that policies introduced to address the climate crisis are fair, and are seen to be fair. Many more people who were already living in poverty are now struggling with the financial impacts of COVID-19. People from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds have been disproportionately affected. Research shows that [wealth inequality](#) in the UK is vast. We believe the time has come to explore options for taxing wealth more effectively. As a logical first step, income from wealth (such as capital gains and dividends) should be taxed at the same rate as income from work.

2. A peaceful world

Peace is a core Quaker value – we are called to 'take away the occasion for war'. Over hundreds of years, Quakers have practised and promoted nonviolent methods of resolving conflict and structural approaches to preventing war. We welcome some of the shifts that have occurred during COVID-19 from violence to compassion, for example the [military helping with coronavirus testing](#) and the [UK falling in global arms sales rankings](#). This must continue during the recovery and beyond.

As part of [Rethinking Security](#), we call for security based on justice, cooperation and sustainability. To provide holistic, human security, we believe the government must

stop investing in arms and fossil fuels, and invest more in renewables and public services. Further urgent measures must be put in place for nuclear disarmament.

COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement provide an opportunity to reflect critically on our education system and the values it instils. [Peace education](#), with its emphasis on relationships and critical thinking, can be part of the rebuilding process.

3. A humane immigration and asylum system

Quakers have long offered [sanctuary](#) to people forced to flee their homes. The COVID-19 crisis made this more challenging, but we continued to advocate for racial justice and the rights of people from migrant backgrounds.

Policies such ‘no recourse to public funds’, ‘right to rent’ checks, and the ban on asylum-seekers doing paid work, force people from migrant backgrounds into poverty. They exacerbate racism by creating mistrust of people perceived as not being British, and by reinforcing the false view that migrants do not contribute to society. The pandemic caused many people from migrant backgrounds to fall deeper into destitution.

The government took action to address this, such as releasing some people from detention and granting free treatment for COVID-19. The recovery is an opportunity to improve our immigration system further.

Quakers in Britain call for the government to end the hostile environment and allow people from migrant backgrounds to access work, housing and healthcare. We would like to see those released from detention remain at liberty, and an end to the use of Immigration Removal Centres. This would restore dignity to people from migrant backgrounds and enable them to contribute fully to our economy and society.

4. A transformative justice system

Courts and prisons have been an important issue during the COVID-19 crisis. Quakers in Britain welcomed the government’s early release scheme, but were disappointed that this affected [less than a hundred people](#). Enforcing restrictive regimes in prisons helped combat the spread of the virus but reduced people’s prospects for rehabilitation, so it was harmful to them and society in the longer term.

The government could extend the early release scheme introduced during the pandemic. We also believe it is vital that the UK government adopt the [presumption against short sentences](#) that is working well in Scotland. The government must do more to address racial inequality in the criminal justice system.

Ultimately, we call for a [wholehearted shift](#) from punishment to prevention and rehabilitation. Justice plays a crucial role in creating peaceful and inclusive communities and building a country where civil liberties can flourish. An emphasis on transformative justice would help improve resilience in our system, so it isn't in perpetual crisis.

How can you promote and embody this vision?

Here are **10 ways** you can build back better:

1. Email [your MP](#), citing Quakers in Britain's [briefing for MPs and Peers](#) which they will have received, and highlighting your priorities for build back better.
2. As a meeting, invite your MP, MS or MSP to meet Friends to discuss how you could work together to build back better.
3. Join up with other faith and civil society groups in your area to build a local movement for build back better.
4. Host an event for Friends and the wider community to start a conversation and raise awareness of the need to build back better.
5. Contact your [local councillors](#) to ask how you can work with them to build back better in your area.
6. Sign up to the [Build Back Better](#) campaign and take part in their activities.
7. Start conversations with friends, family and colleagues about what they liked and disliked about lockdown and what they'd like to keep or change during the recovery.
8. Tweet at [@BritishQuakers](#) and [@BuildBckBetterUK](#) using #BuildBackBetter.
9. Join a campaign to target companies that have a big impact on our economy and society, such as banks, energy companies, and those delivering public contracts in immigration and criminal justice. Examples of such campaigns include [ShareAction](#), [Don't Bank on the Bomb](#) and [Corporate Watch](#).
10. Take this opportunity to come together with others to learn more about the aspects of building back better that interest you. You could join online workshops or start a reading group, using reading lists such as these on [climate justice](#), [anti-racism](#) and [abolitionism](#).

You'll find lots to help you at www.quaker.org.uk/toolkit-for-action. We also recommend you sign up to [Quaker Faith in Action](#) to receive regular stories and ideas about acting on Quaker concerns.

If you have any questions or would like to share your experience of campaigning for build back better, please contact Grace Da Costa, Public Affairs and Advocacy Manager, at politics@quaker.org.uk.