

Report of Wales Focus Group of Meeting of Friends in Wales

Aberystwyth February 2nd 2019

The Focus Group has just enjoyed its first meeting since the combined meetings of the Focus Group and MFW Trustees in the summer months. Three of the four AMs were represented.

There was only one agenda item which was to explore and establish the communication between the Welsh Government, CYTUN, the Focus Group and individual Friends in Wales.

It is well worth re-iterating the satisfaction with which we can look back on the first few years of devolution in Wales. Although Devolution has been limited to certain areas of control, the Welsh Government has introduced many pieces of progressive legislation, for example:

- Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013
- Human Transplantation (Wales) Act 2013
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016
- Public Health (Wales) Act 2017
- Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018

In these cases, for example in charging for plastic bags, in organ donation, in free prescriptions, in a smoking ban, and a moratorium on fracking, the Welsh government has taken positive action well in advance of the UK government and has been quite clear in their decision making, while the UK government has hedged about with options, and taken much longer over reaching a decision. There have been many cases where the UK Government has preferred to attempt to achieve their aspirations with voluntary industry- led programmes rather than directives. Generally speaking the health and well-being of Welsh people have been primary for the Welsh government, while in England targets, security and finance have been more important.

CYTUN Churches Together in Wales is an ecumenical organisation which was formed in 1990 as successor to the former Council of Churches for Wales, but does not include the evangelical churches. MFW has a Trustee (Gethin Evans) of the organisation and a representative (David Harris) on the Laser committee that keeps an eye on the consultations created by the Government. David feeds back information from the Laser group to the Focus Group. CYTUN makes very well constructed responses to Government consultations, but, being ecumenical, can only speak with confidence where the member churches are in agreement (for non-Welsh speakers - Cytûn is the Welsh-language word for "agreed").

The Quaker testimony to the World is simple and radical, there is that of God in every person. That testimony leads us to standpoints on peace, truth, equality, sustainability, simplicity. When we apply those standpoints to the consultations issued by the Government there will be times when we might be too radical for some churches, or that we may wish to speak individually, in those cases we may choose to reply directly to the Welsh Government, but, in the majority of cases we would reply as part of CYTUN.

As a small organisation we often "punch above our weight" in speaking truth to power, but there are also issues where we have to accept that we cannot express an opinion on every matter considered by Government.

In those circumstances where we feel that we have something that needs to be expressed the Focus Group will compose a statement or reply agreed by the members, that will then be circulated to the MFW Clerks, Catherine James and Tricia Jones and the Clerk to Trustees (Deborah Rowlands) and possibly other knowledgeable Friends seen as appropriate, to ensure the checks and balances necessary. The response will then be circulated to AM Clerks for information.

Statements and responses of this type can also be posted onto the web-site and the Facebook page, and offered to the editor of Calon. This will ensure that all the membership of MFW have opportunities to see the statements being made on their behalf by by Welsh Quakers.

Peter Hussey

Clerk to MFW Focus Group