1) ‘Whether criminal sanction in relation to prostitution should continue to fall more heavily on those who sell sex, rather than those who buy it.’

- Why not remove the criminal sanction altogether? In the same way that gay sex was decriminalised in England in the 1960s, there is no justifiable reason for the continued criminalisation of consenting sex between adults where money is exchanged. See more info here.
- **New Zealand successfully decriminalised prostitution in 2003.** The New Zealand Prostitution Reform Act (PRA) is a good basis for any serious change in prostitution law and policy. It removes sex work from the criminal law, allows people to work together collectively, and distinguishes between consenting sex and violence and exploitation. Crucially, it has been shown to improve sex workers’ working conditions, while making it easier for those who want to get out, to do so: “The majority (70%) felt sex workers were now more likely to report incidents of violence to the police. It appeared that this was particularly true for the street workers.” More recent research from the Christchurch School of Medicine review found over 90% of sex workers believed the PRA gave them additional employment, legal, health and safety rights. Many found it easier to refuse clients and said police attitudes to sex workers had changed for the better.
- Criminalising clients undermines sex workers’ safety. One sex worker describes here how the Northern Ireland law criminalising clients has made it more dangerous for her to work. Criminalisation forces sex workers to work in isolation at greater risk of attack (The Scotsman, 2008).
- Proposals to increase criminalisation are led by an “unlikely union of evangelical Christians with feminist campaigners”. This Inquiry follows in the footsteps of the discredited All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade which chose as its secretariat the homophobic charity CARE.

2) ‘What the implications are for prostitution-related offences of the Crown Prosecution Service’s recognition of prostitution as violence against women.’

- This Crown Prosecution Service policy results in increased arrests of sex workers. For example, the criteria for brothel-keeping prosecutions doesn’t rely on whether women are being coerced or abused, only on how long they have been working and how much money is been made. So no distinction is made between small collectives, where women work co-operatively, keep their own money and set their own hours and establishments run by coercive bosses.
- **Women Against Rape comments:** “We’ve helped thousands of rape victims and all have had strong views about when sex was consenting and when it was not, regardless of whether it was part of a long-term relationship, casual or paid for. Only 6.5% of reported rape ends in conviction — targeting clients further diverts police time and resources away from tackling the violence sex workers report.”

3) ‘What impact the Modern Slavery Act 2015 has had to date on trafficking for purposes of prostitution, what further action is planned, and how effectively the impact is being measured.’
• A proposal to criminalise clients as part of the Modern Slavery Act was resoundingly defeated. See here.

• The trafficking of men, women and children for labour exploitation is far more widespread than sex trafficking – “for every trafficking victim subjected to forced prostitution, nine people are forced to work” in other fields. See here. Why then disproportionately target the sex industry?

• Trafficking is forced or bonded labour, abduction, kidnapping, false imprisonment, rape, grievous bodily harm, extortion. Existing laws cover all these offences and could be used to prosecute the assailants of women and children, whatever work they are being forced into.

• False claims that over 80% of sex workers are trafficked have been peddled by politicians looking to increase the criminalisation of prostitution. In fact, less than 6% of sex workers in the UK are trafficked (Mai, 2011). “Many migrants prefer working in the sex industry rather than the “unrewarding and sometimes exploitative conditions they meet in non-sexual jobs” (Evening Standard, 2011).

• Despite government claims about prioritising trafficking, most victims get no protection. A parliamentary committee (2005) found they are frequently deprived of “protection, access to services and justice” and “treated as immigration offenders facing detention and removals.

4) ‘Whether further measures are necessary, including legal reforms, to:’

– ‘Assist those involved in prostitution to exit from it’

• Women are the hardest workers yet are the poorest everywhere — why not address this “inequality”. Benefit sanctions and cuts, rising homelessness, domestic violence and low wages, have caused an increase in prostitution. Why aren’t these issues being addressed by politicians who claim to want to save women from prostitution?

• Empower in Thailand spoke in the UK parliament recently and said that sex workers are earning at least twice the minimum wage. For some women exploitation in a brothel is an escape from destitution or more acute exploitation in domestic work, agricultural work, factories and sweatshops.

– ‘Increase the extent to which exploiters are held to account’

• Who are the exploiters? Brothel-keeping and controlling law claims to target those who exploit sex workers but in reality are used against women working together for safety. These laws criminalise consenting relationships between prostitute women and partners, family members, friends, working colleagues and others. Trafficking law also claims to target violent exploiters but the law is more often used to target immigrant women for deportation.

• Women working on the street say they pay up to 80% of their income in fines — what exploitation! Proceeds of Crime (POCA) legislation is used to seize savings and assets (eg: a house, car, jewellery) from people convicted of prostitution offences. The burden of proof is reversed so the person has to prove the money did not come from criminal activity. Debts under POCA are the only ones which can’t be cancelled by a prison term.
If politicians were really objecting to exploitation they would object to the working conditions in those jobs which are usually the alternative to sex work and that create the conditions for prostitution to flourish. We’ve not heard them complain about Amazon, or other corporations which cut wages and work their employees into the ground – far from it they are rewarded for making fortunes at the expense of others.

– ‘Discourage demand which drives commercial sexual exploitation’

- An example of a biased and presumptive question. Who is to say that prostitution is driven by men’s desire for sex rather than women’s need for money?

- Research on the Swedish law which criminalised clients found: “no convincing empirical evidence that the law has resulted in a decline in sex work . . .” Under the constant threat of police interference, sex workers are forced to hurry the process of screening and negotiating with clients, which makes them take more risks. It also found that sex workers have often been prosecuted as ‘pimps’ when they band together for safety. Landlords have been pressured by police to evict sex worker tenants under threat of being prosecuted themselves. Police have also been known to report sex workers to hotels and – most devastatingly – sex work is frequently cited as a reason for refusing child custody. Rose Alliance, the sex worker organisation in Sweden, conducted their own research and found that 63% of sex workers said that the sex purchase law had created more prejudices.

- Domestic violence, including rape, is the most common form of violence against women, yet no-one suggests that relationships between women and men should be banned.

Claims that violence, particularly trafficking, can be reduced by criminalising clients are disproven by a 2014 Vancouver study which found that “criminalisation and policing strategies that target clients… profoundly impacted the safety strategies sex workers employed.”