

Pembrokeshire Man Calls for Justice Reform After Acquittal

August 4, 2025

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Two men from West Wales who spent years behind bars for crimes they did not commit are now calling for urgent legal reforms to address how the justice system treats wrongful convictions.

Brian Buckle, 51, from Fishguard in Pembrokeshire, was sentenced to 15 years in 2017 after being convicted at Swansea Crown Court of 16 counts of historical child sexual abuse.

Following a retrial in 2023, where a new jury unanimously found him not guilty, his conviction was quashed.

The acquittal came after his family raised over £500,000 to challenge flawed DNA evidence used in the original trial. Despite being fully cleared, Mr Buckle's attempts to claim compensation through the Ministry of Justice's Statutory Scheme and the Miscarriages of Justice Application Service (MOJAS) were rejected.

This is due to a legal change introduced in 2014 by the then-coalition government, which altered the threshold for miscarriage of justice claims. Under current rules, individuals must prove their innocence *beyond a reasonable doubt*, a burden many say is almost impossible to meet. A not-guilty verdict alone no longer suffices.

Mr Buckle is not alone in his experience. Gareth Jones, 39, from Llandovery in Carmarthenshire, was jailed in 2008 for nine years after being wrongly convicted of sexually assaulting a vulnerable care home patient.

Jones, who has learning difficulties, said he found the woman bleeding and alerted staff, only to be arrested the next day. "It was hell from there," he told *LBC*. "I'm not a monster. I wouldn't do that."

He served three and a half years before students at Cardiff University's Innocence Project began investigating his case. The conviction was overturned in 2018 after six years of legal work. However, like Mr Buckle, Jones received no compensation or formal apology from the police or prosecution services.

Mr Buckle is now spearheading a campaign for reform, calling for what he has termed "Buckle's Law." The proposal would allow juries to state whether their verdict was based on actual belief in the accused's innocence or merely insufficient evidence.

"They heard the evidence. They should be asked why they found the person not guilty," Mr Buckle said. "That's the only way to meet the legal bar as it stands."

Legal advocacy group **APPEAL** has backed calls for change. Its Co-Director, Matt Foot, pointed out that five judges at the European Court of Human Rights criticised the UK's current standard as "virtually insurmountable."

“It’s arbitrary who qualifies,” Mr Foot said. “Unless you have rare DNA evidence pointing elsewhere, the state takes no responsibility for its errors.”

Although Mr Buckle has received a formal apology from the Crown Prosecution Service relating to his original trial, his legal battle is ongoing. His current barrister, Stephen Vullo KC, has received a letter from the Ministry of Justice confirming that the department will “reconsider” the compensation case.

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson stated: “We recognise the grave impact of miscarriages of justice and are committed to supporting individuals in rebuilding their lives. The Law Commission is currently consulting on the law relating to criminal appeals, including compensation. We will carefully consider their findings.”

While that consultation is underway, the lives of those cleared by the courts remain in limbo, with justice still out of reach.