

Becoming 'Quakers in Scotland'

Why, what does it mean, what would it affect?

Why

The work required to run a charity has increased substantially with new regulations and laws. We are finding it increasingly difficult to fill key roles, including the trustee roles that carry our legal responsibilities. In response, in many UK regions Area Meetings are looking at amalgamating their charities. Many other organisations are doing the same. For Quakers it should reduce the number of role-holders, releasing energy and enabling some economies of scale. It is likely to entail paid central administrative support.

Also an opportunity? We do a number of things together across Scotland already, with success in amplifying our concerns. Our permanent presence at the Scottish Parliament has been particularly notable. Situating our charity at a national level could strengthen both our community and the impact of our activities.

How we got here

- 2015 North of Scotland Friends (NSAM) began to ask about future organisation
- 2017 NSAM asked GM to consider a single body for Scotland
- 2018 Options considered at a dedicated meeting – reported diverse views to GM
- 2020 NSAM reapproached GM
- 2021 Options for Scotland group (OfS1) set up by GM
- 2022 OfS1 reported to GM in March. OfS2 appointed to consider more radical options.
- 2023 OfS2 reported to GM in June, recommending a single organisation. Further details of possible ways forward that were requested. GM in September then recorded agreement from AMs to work towards a more detailed vision.

Where we are now

GM appointed a QiS coordinating group (QiS-CG) to outline and create a single charity Quakers in Scotland, that AMs might choose to join, laying down our current 6 charities (4 AMs, GM, and Dundee Friends Property Trust). It seeks endorsement from AMs of the creation of the notional single charity as the first of several steps towards a single Quaker organisation for Scotland.

The wording of a governing document (constitution) for QiS is at an advanced stage, but needs further opinions and legal review before coming back to Friends. This document does not need to include details of how we will work at local and regional levels.

Discussions are under way on how we would manage property and money.

Discussions are beginning on other essential aspects of how we would organise our other spiritual affairs, under the heading of Community. It includes how we could best arrange such matters as fellowship, eldership, membership, nominations, marriages, funerals.

Steps if moving to single body

(1) Agree constitution for new body and seek advice from the Scottish charity regulator (OSCR) and others; (2) agree how to transfer and manage property and money and other statutory necessities; (3) agree how we would manage other spiritual affairs.

Then (4) existing charities join as they agree; (5) when transfers of responsibility, property and funds are complete, lay down the old charities.

We are working on 1 and 2 and beginning work on 3. No commitment to joining is possible until these are agreed.

What would having a single organisation mean for us?

In our Local Meeting – we shouldn't anticipate perceptible changes for Friends attending local meetings. If a local meeting has a meeting house, it will still need to have people locally responsible for its day to day management. The responsibilities and participation of QiS and the local meeting would be agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding. Any employees would now be employed and paid by the central organisation.

In our Area Meeting – Area Meetings could still meet, whether labelled with a new term or still called AMs. New groupings, including non-geographical groupings (for instance young Friends, remote Friends) could also be created.

Several things would become simpler for existing AMs with removal of employment, property ownership, need for annual reporting and accounting. Fewer trustees would be required from each region. Should an AM still have difficulty making appointments, informal amalgamations would be simpler under the umbrella of a single charity.

Functions such as membership, eldership, nominations, could be looked after regionally, as they are now, or differently if Friends agreed that would be better. These are for discussion.

FURTHER INFORMATION

These links are also on the General Meeting webpage, in blue text just beneath the title.

FAQ Frequently asked Questions about (1) the draft governing document, and (2) wider questions. <https://quakerscotland.org/general-meeting/qis-news/faq>

QiS-CG news <https://quakerscotland.org/general-meeting/qis-news> - details of how to contact the group are at the foot of this page.

FAQ from OfS2 (June 2023) <https://quakerscotland.org/general-meeting/options-scotland/ofs2-report/faq-ofs2>

The full OfS2 report, with links to OfS1 <https://quakerscotland.org/general-meeting/options-scotland> (shortcut bit.ly/scotquaker-options)