

What holds us together as Quakers in Scotland?

January 2023

Meeting for Worship is where we can be together, worship together and witness together. For some that happens locally, while others connect with other Friends of a similar age or outlook, some in person and others online...*and yet we are all part of Quakers in Scotland.*

Do our current arrangements suit our purposes?

We have become anxious about the burdens of organisation, and we now face the real prospect that, if essential roles cannot be filled, then an Area Meeting might be laid down.

Our current arrangement of a General Meeting (GM) and 4 Area Meetings (AMs) supporting 35 Local Meetings (LMs) and Worshipping Groups, with 6 separate charities (including a property trust). They require nearly 300 roles to be filled plus those in LMs. With 678 Members and 622 Attenders in Scotland, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find Friends to take on these responsibilities.

How can we find a way to avoid Friends feeling that they are taking on too much or for too long. How can we make it easier for more Friends to enjoy being involved, and for our decision making to be straightforward? How can we ensure our structures are easily understood by all and readily explained to newcomers?

How can we best manage our affairs in such a way that both feeds our souls and meets our responsibilities? How can we support our Meetings (in person and online) to offer community, hospitality, witness and worship?

Learning and leadings

AT [GM in March 2022 \(22/03/11\)](#) you asked us to find some answers. In particular you asked us to consider new ways in which we might better organise ourselves to release our energy for what we are called to do.

Quakers in Scotland are not alone in facing these challenges, and we have spent time hearing how Friends in Wales, London, Yorkshire, Central England and Northumbria are finding their way forwards. We have kept in mind that our structures have evolved over time (in 1945 there were 300 Members and 2 AMs). Any changes made now are not forever.

Themes and considerations

Whether we meet in large Friends Meeting Houses, in local community buildings, in our homes, join online or gather for a day, we are **all** Quakers in Scotland. We meet for worship and to act as moved by the spirit. Our witness and worship, our life as a church, and our organisation are deeply connected with each other - they are indivisible.

Perceptions about how we connect to the wider family of Quakers vary. While some find AMs are an essential bridge between LMs and GM, others consider AMs are as remote an idea as GM. Some find familiar fellowship at AM, others find it in interest groups or peer groups. How can we better create a sense of connection as Quakers in Scotland?

To raise the spirits of our faith community we need to allow room for new and creative ideas and approaches to grow. This will excite some, while others will be anxious in case we lose something familiar which they feel has served us well in the past and is serving us well now.

The risk is growing that, as charities, we may fall short of our legal and regulatory responsibilities. LMs are there to support our church structure as well as be supported by it.

Even if that doesn't happen, ignoring the possibility is placing unreasonable pressure on those serving on our behalf. Finding a better way is the responsibility of us all.

Increasing our use of professional help to undertake time consuming work could support those we ask to undertake serious responsibilities on our behalf. There will be a cost for this, which may not necessarily save money elsewhere. But reducing the load of some roles might enable more of us to see holding them as a privilege of service rather than a burden. In any event, these options must be affordable and sustainable.

The Meeting for Worship for Church Affairs remains the heart of our discernment and this will always be where decisions are made.

Where does this lead us?

Like Friends elsewhere in Britain Yearly Meeting, we believe the case for change is a powerful one. "The priesthood of all believers is a foundation of our understanding of the church." (QF&P 27.35). How can we all uphold and support those who are crying for help?

We do not feel that we can go on as we are, or to continue by making some minor adjustments. Our current thinking is that we should:

1. Create a simpler organisational framework that embraces the diversity in which Quakers witness, worship and build community, and creates space for new ways to develop.
2. Significantly reduce the unnecessary duplication of tasks and functions that comes from our four AMs and six charities, each with its own role holders and reporting requirements.
3. Reduce the burden on role holders, including through the use of paid professional help.

We hope this will encourage and support more Friends to want to be part of Quaker life within and outside their Meeting, and for all Friends everywhere to feel a connection with activity undertaken on their behalf.

What are the forthcoming consultation sessions for?

The [upcoming sessions](#) are an opportunity for you to contribute to what is required of us to strengthen and sustain our community. We hope to hear what is important to you, as Quakers in Scotland.

Our faith community is precious. What will feed our souls and meet our responsibilities? What will encourage us to be together, worship together and witness together?

These sessions are for sharing and discussion; they are not for making decisions. Later in the year we will circulate our report and recommendations to AMs and GM, at which point Friends will be asked to discern the way forward.

We look forward to meeting with you, Friends!

2nd Options for Scotland Group

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