

What is the concern?

Over a number of years there have been repeated expressions of concern about the organisational well-being of Quakers in Scotland. While this has often originated from Nominations Committees struggling to find Friends to serve, and some existing role holders feeling under stress, there are broader issues to consider.

The nature of society has changed over the last century. Current Quaker structures worked when there were significant numbers of business people who had leisure time to serve, or when it was common for only one member of the household to be employed. These structures don't work so well when virtually all Friends of 'working age' are employed.

The problem is often presented as a difficulty of recruiting young people to roles. This both disparages the experience and wisdom brought by the active retired and doesn't recognise the extent to which younger Friends are engaged in Quakerism in ways that are outside our current structures. There are problems, for example, in maintaining buildings, or finding appropriate places to rent, for us to meet together, yet we also recognise that a 'living' building can be a place of visible Quaker witness. With greater awareness of the fragility of our climate, choosing whether to travel to gather in person is less straightforward. Online connectivity is a boon to some, but a form of exclusion to others. The physical distances between us in Scotland can lead to an even greater sense of congregationalism than is common elsewhere in Britain Yearly Meeting.

Where has this current concern come from?

The concern has been voiced in different ways across Scotland. At General Meeting in 2018 a range of options were considered and a number of these that aimed at offering support across Area Meeting boundaries were agreed upon. Unfortunately, many of the options agreed on didn't happen or were not sustained; though some have restarted since this Working Group began work. The impetus for this round of consideration came from a minute from North of Scotland and came to General Meeting after consideration by the Area Meetings. General Meeting set up this group with the brief to

'identify options for GM and AMs to consider, including organisational changes we can make within our current structures which would benefit us all. Work already done will be considered along with new thinking. We hope the group will be creative in generating and exploring further options.'

Our Working Group was set up with two Friends suggested by each Area Meeting and convened by a Friend from outwith Scotland.

What are we aiming to achieve and what is required of us?

We discern that the underlying challenge is to be (or to re-create) a faith community that wants to be together, do things together, and worship together. We need to be of strong heart to exist into the future and work more closely together. A thriving Quaker community is one that is more accessible and visible in Scottish society, one that is able to make strong representation on the issues that are important. We need to be positive and forward looking.

How have the concerns been expressed?

The struggles faced by Quakers in Scotland are many and varied and are shared by other faith groups and voluntary organisations. We feel that the task before us and the options we offer, should address the following in particular.

- A. Community: How can we continue to develop thriving Quaker communities finding more ways that enable us to spend more time together, worship together and witness together?
- B. Roles: How can we ensure that we have only the roles to carry out the tasks we need and how can we unlock even greater participation in undertaking these tasks and roles?
- C. Communication: How can we better understand each other, learn from each other and support each other?
- D. Buildings: How can we ensure that the buildings we want to retain are more of an opportunity than a burden and those we rent are appropriate and accessible?

Expressing all this in tabular form

What do we want for Quakers in Scotland?	What are the current issues?	What can we do about it?	How?
<p>Thriving Quaker communities</p> <p>Quaker community working together</p> <p>Strong heart</p> <p>Work close together</p> <p>Visible presence</p> <p>Strong representation</p> <p>Easy to join, accessible</p> <p>Positive feeling that we want to be together</p> <p>Willingness to change</p>	<p><u>A. Community</u></p> <p>Declining numbers</p> <p>Difficulty attracting new members</p> <p>Demographic</p> <p>Dispersed and isolated communities</p> <p>Distance and reluctance to travel</p> <p><u>B. Roles</u></p> <p>Congregationalism (i.e. Friends focused locally only)</p> <p>Overburdened Friends</p> <p>Overload on role holders</p> <p>Too few Friends to fill current roles</p> <p>Perceptions around nominations and service</p> <p>Quaker structures and practice do not reflect current members lifestyles and circumstances</p> <p><u>C. Communication</u></p> <p>Poor communication</p> <p>Lack of support / isolation of role holders</p> <p>Duplication of work producing documents</p> <p>Lack of knowledge, experience and understanding of Quaker structure and practice</p> <p><u>D. Buildings</u></p> <p>Burden of managing buildings</p> <p>Trustees: who should/shouldn't be appointed, number and frequency of meetings</p>	<p>Re-invigorate our communities to sustain our worship and witness</p> <p>Encourage cooperation, communication, collaboration, contributions and compassion</p> <p>Simplify administration – financial, property, compliance</p> <p>Reduce the number of roles and/or burden of roles</p> <p>Adapt in response to wider use of Zoom</p> <p>Use BYM publication <i>Our Faith in the Future</i></p>	<p>Local Development Worker in post</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Offer more training</p> <p>Lay down unnecessary roles</p> <p>Distinguish between necessary tasks and traditional roles</p> <p>Some tasks can be reconfigured</p> <p>Share services and skills</p> <p>Zoom groups for role holders</p> <p>Working Groups to prepare Scottish wide policy documents</p> <p>Harness professional help</p> <p>Renew residential events</p> <p>Structural changes options</p>

How can we strengthen our Scottish Quaker community?

To strengthen our community:

We need to work together in **cooperation**, for the benefit of all Quakers in Scotland

We need better **communication** to share our experience and expertise, our problems and solutions

We need **collaboration** to reduce duplication of documents and projects

We want to encourage and enable everyone to make their **contribution**, be it spiritually in worship, physically in service and financially.

We want to have **compassion** and to care for our fellow Quakers and for the Religious Society of Friends.



Our Faith in the Future

We see this as closely aligned with Britain Yearly Meeting's '*Our faith in the future*' which outlines what Quakers in Britain today would like the Society to be like in the future. A future where:

- Meeting for worship is the bedrock of living as a Quaker
- Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age
- All Friends understand and live by Quaker discipline
- Quaker values are active in the world
- Quakers work collaboratively
- Quakers are well known and widely understood

What we can do now

	Opportunities	Benefits	Difficulties	Issues addressed
1.	Role holder networks a. Groups of Friends with similar roles or responsibilities can meet online.	Provides opportunities for mutual support and sharing of experience, but also allows them to learn about the sometimes rather different ways, in which other meetings operate.	Internet access is a problem for some Friends Lack of technical skill	Lack of support / isolation of role holders Duplication of work producing documents
	b. Friends from out with an Area Meeting can be asked to support	Friends with significant eldership experience have been asked to support particular situations and meetings.	Could increase burden on existing role holders	Overload on role holders
	c. Role holders can be invited to attend equivalent meetings in a different Area Meeting.	Learning opportunities See different ways things can be done	Friends would need to be mindful that if you are present at a meeting, you are taking part in the discernment, you cannot just observe and so should be very careful if led to contribute.	Lack of support / isolation of role holders Duplication of work producing documents
2.	Special interest groups a. Informal networks of interested Friends can meet on zoom.	Generating interest and support for Friends involved in this field. Can be spiritual development as well as outward witness	Requires instigation and channels for communication + raising issues	Quaker community working together
	b. Informal networks of Friends with particular interests can be encouraged to feed into and support the work of the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group.	Greater participation and involvement Opportunity to get to know a wider community of Friends Builds confidence of those involved	Requires instigation and channels for communication + raising issues	Quaker community working together
	c. Each member of the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group can be supported by informal network(s) of	Networks would generate interest and share experience	Would not speak on behalf of Friends, this would be done through the	Strong representation

	Opportunities	Benefits	Difficulties	Issues addressed
	Friends interested in a particular field of witness.	Builds confidence of the Friends involved	Parliamentary Engagement Working Group	
3.	General Meeting appointed groups General Meeting for Scotland can set up groups with reps from all Area Meetings e.g. Options for Scotland Working Group	Promotes working together	Care needed to avoid creating groups without consideration of potential burden on individuals	Quaker community working together Willingness to change
4.	Quakers in Scotland programme General Meeting for Scotland can decide to give greater importance to its work, described in Quaker Faith and Practice 5.03a, as ' <i>...facilitating contact between Friends of all ages, and providing opportunities for training and mutual support for those with special responsibilities...</i> '	Scottish wide training, enquirers events, discussion groups, speakers would enable Friends to get to know each other as they learn.	Sensitivity required to ensure this supports local Friends and does not create perceptions of inappropriate centralisation	Positive feeling that we want to be together Strong heart
5.	Residential events Encourage residential events Encourage Friends to attend residential weekends across Area Meeting boundaries Make use of the General Meeting website to promote existing or new events	Building a Quaker community	Cost in time, energy and money to organise Cost to attend, but bursaries are available	Dispersed and isolated communities
6.	Area Meeting boundaries Local Meetings can move to neighbouring Area Meetings	To respond to local needs Creating better balance across Area Meetings	See QFP 4.12 Need to involve OSCR	Too few Friends to fill roles Dispersed and isolated communities
7.	Professional support and advice Increase use of professional input for bookkeeping, property management, HR and employment matters, safeguarding and other trustee responsibilities.	Provides advisory resource for Trustees etc to draw upon Minimises duplication of roles and resources. Encourages consistency of approach	Financial cost Centralised functions and resources may not address local realities Would require oversight	Overburdened Friends Burden of managing buildings

What we could do in the future

As we strengthen our Scottish Quaker Community then we may wish to consider whether structural change could further benefit our community. There has been much discussion about this in recent years, including in our group. Structural change can energise, or it can consume energy by looking inwards. Our sense is that structural change works when its purpose and the way it will bring improvement are clear. We should be ready to take this step when we are confident that it will contribute to energising our faith community. We have considered the following possibilities which would require further detailed consideration and investigation:

	Possibilities	Benefits	Difficulties
8.	All the Quaker charities within Scotland could be merged to form a single charitable body, while the Area Meetings continued with all their other current responsibilities.	One set of Scotland-wide trustees Area Meetings retain their identity and responsibility for community and spiritual life of the meetings Future changes to Area Meeting boundaries would not involve OSCR.	Finding Friends willing to take on the responsibility and workload of being a trustee for the whole of Scotland, including managing all the properties Need for a close relationship between Trustees and local Friends Need to involve OSCR
9.	The responsibilities of Area Meetings and General Meeting re-configured so that all matters which could be done on a Scotland wide basis were transferred to General Meeting, leaving Area meetings to support Local Meetings.	Area Meetings would have reduced responsibilities and could focus more on developing a sense of a Quaker community.	Increased load on Friends serving General Meeting without removing the AM Trustee role Ensuring clear understanding of responsibilities
10.	Lay down Area Meetings in Scotland, choosing that the General Meeting for Scotland take on their responsibilities	One set of Scotland-wide trustees, one clerking team, one overall team of elders and pastoral care Friends etc. Might create larger teams of role holders, with more possibility of learning from experienced Friends More community ties across the whole of Scotland and a greater pool of new and experienced Friends to draw on.	Finding Friends willing to take on the responsibility and workload of caring for the whole of Scotland, including managing all of the properties: Need for a close relationship between Trustees and local Friends

What suggestions have we heard and laid down

	Possibilities	Benefits	Difficulties
11,	General Meeting for Scotland could become the formal employer for all paid Quaker posts in Scotland, except those employed by Britain Yearly Meeting.	Only one set of trustees would need to be involved with the duties of being an employer and with employment law.	This would significantly increase the burden on General Meeting and require a complex system for covering the costs and line managing the staff. It would also require close liaison with local Friends. Better collaboration on preparing template contracts and effective use of professional advice and guidance could simplify and support this task. Instead the same issues could be addressed by:- 1. Role holder networks 7. Professional support and advice
12.	It would be possible for Friends to be appointed as trustees of another Area Meetings in addition to their own, a system of shared trustees.	Sharing of experience at the point where it is helpful because it's not always obvious beforehand what advice or training is available or would be helpful. We should listen to the experience in Wales and the Marches.	It was felt that asking a Friend to be a Trustee on two separate trustee bodies so geographically dispersed would be an excessive responsibility to place on anyone. Hopefully by offering more training and support more Friends will be willing to contribute in this service. Instead the same issues could be addressed by:- 1. Role holder networks 4. Quakers in Scotland programme
13	Would a system of shared clerks be possible?	Support at the point when it is immediately needed i.e., during a business meeting.	Some Clerks are already struggling with their workload and should not be asked to carry more. It was felt that rather than a larger load on a few people it would be wiser to spread the load and increase the confidence and service of others through training and support. Instead the same issues could be addressed by:- 1. Role holder networks 4. Quakers in Scotland programme
14	General Meeting could take formal responsibility for the well-being of the Area Meetings within Scotland, just as the Area Meetings have responsibility for their Local Meetings	Provides a structure that oversees the working of the various suggestions for example meetings of role holder groups.	Britain Yearly Meeting is currently the umbrella body of the Church and provides support and guidance through the staff and work of Quaker Life. There seems little benefit to General Meeting duplicating the work.
15	Have professional trustees who could provide expertise, the limits to this are set out in OSCR's trustee remuneration	Professional advice is available when an issue is discussed, not after the trustees meeting requiring some kind of between	It was felt that it was important to follow the Governing Documents requirement that trustees are members of the Meeting to retain the spiritual nature of the work. The trustee's role is Quaker service and

	Possibilities	Benefits	Difficulties
	guide. (It seems that Scottish law is different from English and Welsh law in this respect.)	meetings procedure to be used for complex issues.	relies on the proper use of the Quaker business process. Professional support and guidance can be sought by trustees as and when required. Instead the same issues could be addressed by:- 7. Professional support and advice
16	Lay down General Meeting for Scotland and transfer roles to Area Meetings	Release those occupied by GM roles to become more involved in AMs and LMs	Loss of capacity to influence Scotland wide affairs Increase of burden on Area Meetings – particularly those covering Edinburgh + Glasgow Creates duplication of effort/capacity across Area Meetings

Recommendations

Having considered the range of options for Scotland set out in our report we recommend that General Meeting for Scotland and the Area Meetings consider the following actions.

Opportunities that we can take up now

1. Establish and support role holder networks across Scotland (building on current practice)

Many of these networks are already in existence organised by the role holders themselves. Zoe Prosser, our Local Development Worker, is planning on initiating more role holder groups to meet.
2. Encourage and support Special Interest Groups/Networks using the approach described under (2) above
3. General Meeting for Scotland to be encouraged to use time-limited' appointed groups like the 'Options for Scotland' Working Group, encouraging Friends across Area Meetings to work together to consider issues of common concern
4. General Meeting for Scotland to consider if there are others ways in which it can fulfil its role as described in QFP 5.03a
5. Residential events enabling Friends across Scotland to be encouraged (these could be arranged by General Meeting for Scotland and/or by Area Meetings.)
6. Area Meetings consider if there is any advantage to change boundaries so that Local Meetings move from one Area Meeting to another
7. General Meeting for Scotland, Area Meetings and role holder networks should actively consider whether there are any aspects of their duties which would benefit from a collaborative approach. This could be Scotland wide or just between 2 or more Area Meetings.

Possibilities for the future

8. We recommend General Meeting for Scotland appoint a group to specifically look at the tasks and ongoing workload of the possibilities listed to provide a sound basis of knowledge and understanding for any future discernment on these possibilities, if we are led by the spirit to explore them in the future.

Suggestions to be laid down

9. We recommend General Meeting for Scotland agree not to pursue the suggestions in this table.

Further Recommendation

10. General Meeting for Scotland to agree a way to monitor approaches being adopted elsewhere both within the Simplifying Meetings and beyond to learn from the experience of others.

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