

22/03/11 Report from General Meeting Working Group to identify options for change in the way we work which would benefit Quakers in Scotland

Further to minutes 21/03/19 and 21/09/11 the report of the “Options for Quakers in Scotland” Working Group was circulated to Friends in Scotland with the papers for this meeting. Lesley Richards, convenor of the working group, has presented the report to us today and answered our questions.

We receive this report and will consider the suggested steps we can take now and what we might do in the future to address the main issues for Quakers in Scotland, and to strengthen our Quaker Community in keeping with the vision expressed in BYM's 'Our Faith in the Future'. We are grateful to the group for listing what they see are the current opportunities, for each opportunity giving their analysis of the benefits and difficulties of implementing it, and for a similar analysis of possible changes we might contemplate in the future.

In small, facilitated groups we have considered the following:

For some time now we have been seeking to strengthen our Quaker community in Scotland. Some Friends have expressed the need for radical change, and others the need to maintain our traditional ways of doing things, as far as possible. Today we have heard suggestions of how we might do things differently. What are your thoughts about the need for change? Has the way you feel about it altered?

Following our small group discussions, together we have responded to the report and the working group's recommendations. We welcome this report and recognise that it is a working document, which is part of a continuing process. At this point, it is timely to look at the opportunities which are available now to help us work together more effectively. The report identifies seven:

1. Establish and support role holder networks across Scotland (building on current practice).
2. Encourage and support the formation of networks of Friends with particular interests which might also be a resource for the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group.
3. Encourage GM to appoint time-limited working groups, pulling together Friends from across area meetings to consider issues of common concern.
4. GM might reflect on whether there are other ways in which it can fulfill its role as described in Quaker faith & practice 5.03a.
5. GM and AMs might hold residential events for Friends across Scotland.
6. AMs might consider if there is any advantage to changing boundaries allowing local meetings to move from one area meeting to another.
7. General Meeting, area meetings, and role holder networks might actively consider whether there are any aspects of their duties, which would benefit from a collaborative approach. This could be Scotland wide or between two or more area meetings.

We agree that General Meeting for Scotland should work with the four area meetings to consider which of these seem most appropriate and helpful, and to work out a plan for implementing them together.

We are open to more radical change in our structures, if its purpose and the way it will bring about improvement are clear. We recognise that the pandemic has pushed change upon us and we have adapted to it. We are not alone in contemplating simplifying our structures: within BYM much work is being done on this, and other churches are also engaged in simplifying their structures. It is wise to learn from others and to share our skills. We have been reminded that fundamentally we come together to listen to the leadings of the spirit and to act on them. Our structures should support this, and release us to focus on spiritual growth, community building and witness in the world. We agree to do more exploratory work on possible future structural changes to simplify the way Quakers in Scotland function, starting with the three suggestions listed in the report.

To take things forward, we agree to set up a Working Group to serve for one year, with the following remit:

- Explore and analyse changes to our Quaker structures, which might be of future benefit to Friends in Scotland.
- Keep a watching brief on changes being adopted by Quakers elsewhere to learn from the experience of others.
- Monitor how we are putting into practice the suggestions for strengthening our Quaker community in Scotland.

We ask our GM nominations committee to bring forward the names of 6 Friends to serve on this group, plus a convenor. It would be helpful if there were some overlap with the membership of the 'Options for Quakers in Scotland' Working Group.

We thank the 'Options for Quakers in Scotland' Working Group for its report and Lesley for presenting it.

Since this group has completed its service, we lay it down and thank the members and the convenor for the considerable work they have done in generating options for us to consider.