

Report and recommendation from Options for Scotland Group 2

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Welcome

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and.... helping one another up with a tender hand.”

Isaac Pennington, 1667
QF&P 10.1

These words are very familiar to many Friends, but what does ‘helping one another up with a tender hand’ look like for Quakers in Scotland today?

This question underpins the work we have been doing. We have considered the options and discerned a way forward.

The report is now before you Friends.

In Friendship

Lesley Richards

Convenor

Options for Scotland Group 2

Table of Contents

Our discernment	Page 1
Introduction	Page 2
Options for Scotland	Page 3
Summary table	Page 4
Themes and considerations	Page 5
Where does this lead us	Page 6
Recommendation	Page 7
Making it happen	Page 8

Further information, including the other matters we were asked to report on, is available on the website:

<https://www.quakerscotland.org/general-meeting/options-scotland>

Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

Our discernment

As Quakers in Scotland¹, we come together in worship and to witness to the world. The deep spirituality of worship, silence and stillness in community matter greatly to us, and out of this we discern the call to witness our concerns for truth, justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

To thrive we need to be of strong heart, and be forward looking, ready to make strong representation on the issues that matter. We also need sound arrangements to fulfil our legal obligations, to support those who act on our behalf, and in managing our resources.

Across Scotland we see new ways in which Friends can meet and connect, to serve, and to make our voice heard in the corridors of power. Yet, for some time now, we are hearing ever louder calls for help. Vital roles can't be filled and some who offer service on our behalf are finding it hard. Right now, our organisational arrangements are creating burdens and anxieties. One Area Meeting faces the possibility of being laid down. Are we ready to listen?

The Options for Scotland group has considered these issues carefully and challenged ourselves about what is needed to support the Quaker community as it is now and in the years to come. We have united in a clear sense of what is required of us.

You asked us to consider how things might be different. We have listened to what is happening in other parts of Yearly Meeting. We have even imagined what new arrangements might look like in practice, but we know we should not get ahead of ourselves. As we explored this, the more we realised that small changes would solve little and, at best, would simply delay the inevitable.

To create new space and energy for spiritual growth, for the building of community, and to act out our concerns, we need to be kind to ourselves. We came to see that grasping the nettle, shaping our own future, could be invigorating and inspiring in and of itself.

So, our **recommendations** to Area Meetings and to General Meeting in Scotland are that:

- **We form a single body, 'Quakers in Scotland' through which we support all our Local Meetings, where our membership is held and which enables us to speak, as Quakers, on Scotland wide issues.**
- **We form a single charity (a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), to be responsible for the stewardship of all our resources across Scotland.**
- **We develop further the use of paid professional support to undertake routine tasks and provide advice, easing the load for the Friends we ask to give the greatest practical ministry**

The space that this will create, will allow Quakers in Scotland to gather in spaces and places that work for them – which could be based on geography, age, interest or concern. This already happens but is too often little known.

Friends, we have learned that working through change is as important as the change itself. Involving more Quakers in Scotland in what it will look like and how it will happen, will breathe life into our community. Think it possible that we might enjoy ourselves.

¹ ¹ By 'Quakers in Scotland' and 'Friends' we mean all members, attenders and those who identify as Quakers.

Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

Introduction

The Options for Scotland Group was asked to “*explore and analyse changes to our Quaker structures, which might be of future benefit to Friends in Scotland.*”

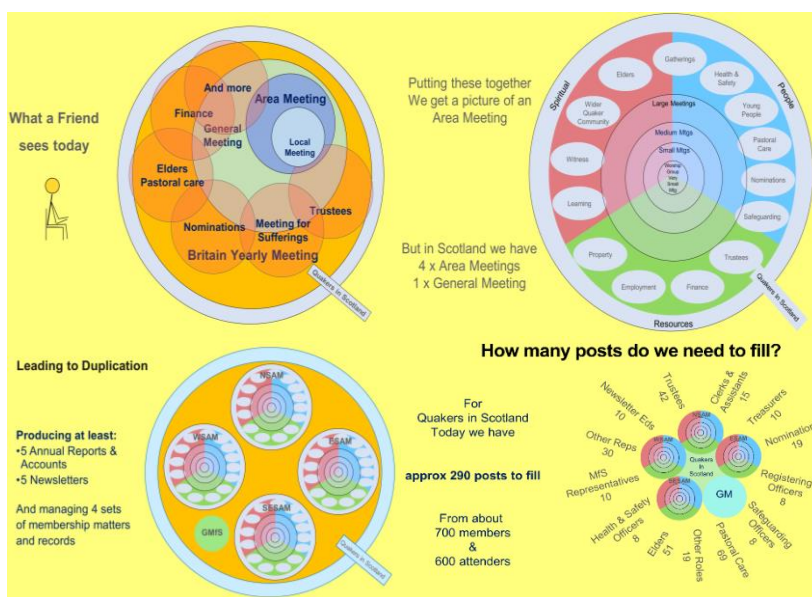
Thriving Quaker communities need sound organisational arrangements that fulfil our legal obligations; we must support those who serve on our behalf, and look after our property. This enables us to engage in our worship, witness and community. They are inter-woven, inseparable.

We were asked to focus on organisational arrangements, but it is not the whole story. In preparing this report we have assembled a lot of material that covers the issues in greater depth. This is available on the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#)

Growing concerns

The Religious Society of Friends is a “priesthood of all believers...without a need for a separated clergy.” (QF&P 27.35). We are grateful to those Friends willing and able to serve in roles. They do so on behalf of us, and we all support and uphold them. As others step into their shoes when their period of service is completed, we create a rich body of experience on which we can draw.

Since 2017 General Meeting for Scotland (GM) has heard sustained expressions of concern about our organisational well-being from Friends across Scotland. The reasons for this have been considered by GM many times since then. North Scotland Area Meeting (AM) encouraged GM “*to be prepared for change, should the time come when one or more Area Meetings cannot meet their legal requirements with regard to trusteeship.*” In 2023, despite many attempts to improve the ways things work, this is now a realistic prospect.



For those not closely involved, our organisational arrangements look confusing. We have Quaker roles and others that meet our responsibilities as charities, replicated across four AMs and GM. The result is that we need to find Friends willing to serve in nearly 300 roles to sustain

Quakers in Scotland. We also reflected on how some Friends feel so distanced from or disinterested in the wider Quaker community that they do not choose to become involved.

All of which makes it increasingly difficult finding Friends willing or able to fill roles which are essential for the organisation to continue. Part of the challenge we face is to develop an environment in which Friends feel positive about contributing to the life of Quakers in Scotland.

Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

Options for Scotland

GM asked the Options for Scotland group to explore these issues including expressing an appetite for “*more radical change in our structures, if its purpose and the way it will bring about improvement are clear.*” We were asked to consider the following in particular, along with the implications of staying as we are (the status quo):

Option A: The reconfiguration of responsibilities - transferring to GM roles/matters that are best done Scotland wide – with AMs supporting Local Meetings (LM).

Option B: All Quaker charities within Scotland to merge to form a single charitable body, while Area Meetings (AMs) continued with all their other current responsibilities.

Option C: Lay down AMs in Scotland, creating a single body to take on their responsibilities

In the meantime, other ideas that were suggested are already being taken forward within current arrangements. Progress on these is summarised on the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#).

In ten years, what would we like to see and feel?

GM invited us to describe how change to our structures might bring about improvement:

1. The process of change should release *energy* rather than consume it.
2. We will see more and a wider range of Friends undertaking *service* or making contributions to the life of our Meetings at all levels, on behalf of Quakers in Scotland. Friends will see roles and tasks (large or small) that they can readily undertake.
3. We will find that we have more *time/capacity* for worship, witness and community, and need less for administrative tasks that do not add to the life of our Meetings.
4. Change will be *affordable* and any *costs* will be proportionate to the benefits they bring.
5. Any change will be *sustainable* - with a realistic prospect of standing the test of time.
6. *Decision making* will be taken more simply, through fewer Quaker bodies.
7. The *buildings* we own are perceived (and managed) as assets, providing a place for Quaker community, outreach and service, or financial income to support us.
8. A simplified, inclusive *organisational structure* should be capable of being explained to local Friends and newcomers in a few sentences.

Benefits and disadvantages of the options for change

The table on the following page provides a simplified comparison between the four options. A more detailed analysis is available at the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#)

When considering options for change, we should take into account the changes that are already happening. Keeping what we have now is not available to us because the impact of the challenges which have driven us to this point will only grow; we will not have heard the cries for help.

We are grateful to the over 120 Friends from all AMs and nearly all Local Meetings (LMs) who contributed to the three online listening sessions in January/February.

Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

OPTIONS FOR CHANGE SUMMARY TABLE (a more detailed analysis at the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#))

BENEFITS			
STATUS QUO	A: RE-CONFIGURING RESPONSIBILITIES	B: SINGLE CHARITY, KEEPING AMs	C: SINGLE CHARITY, LAY DOWN AMs
Our immediate energy can be focused on developing witness, worship & community	Reduced administrative burden for AMs, allowing them to focus on developing witness, worship & community	AMs will remain familiar for local Friends. Less formal business releases energy for developing witness, worship & community	A single AM for Scotland may be easier to explain, and reduce the risk of confusion between GM charity and non-charity AMs
We stay with what is familiar		1 charity replacing 5 will mean 1 set of trustees (10-15) needed instead of 40+ as now	
	Economies of scale could allow for more paid support to increase consistency, efficiency, & professionalism in administrative functions		
Travelling is manageable in 4 smaller areas than 1 large	Some Friends more inclined to serve for people and a Meeting they know	Pooling funds and capacity could provide better opportunities for larger scale witness and community building that have greater impact	
More opportunities for Friends to serve	May engage more Friends in roles they see as less onerous or more stimulating	Continuing with AMs will reduce the risk of congregationalism in LMs	Larger reduction in roles creates a bigger pool of Friends to fill the remaining roles
	Some reduction in number of roles to fill	Fewer roles would create more capacity for developing witness, worship & community	
		A single charity would give AMs and LMs more flexibility to regroup	A single Nominations team could include representation from across Scotland
			Scotland-wide membership may be more attractive to those who identify with communities of interest/age group
DISADVANTAGES			
Does not create the 'space' for those Quakers whose spiritual home is outside of 'their' LM/AM			
No reduction in number of roles	No radical reduction in the number of roles. GM roles will grow in scale	Unlikely to be a radical reduction in non-trustee or statutory roles	Risk of a loss of community that AMs can encourage
Hard to appoint & retain trustee/key roles. Increases burden on fewer Friends		May be harder to fill Scotland wide roles with larger scale responsibilities	
Smaller LMs may founder if AMs are unable to support	Increased load on GM roles without losing the AM Trustee role	Will require involvement of OSCR in changes to charitable structures	
Continued duplication of admin and costs across multiple charities. Also of knowledge needed for legal duties (finance, charity, property, safeguarding)		Greater reliance on technology to overcome geography will require investment, training and familiarisation	
Reputational and financial risk if legal duties not met		The capacity for managing the strong communication required will not be easily found	
Does not reduce risk of significant financial pressures faced by 3 of 4 AMs			
To gain benefits there will be additional costs, needing confidence in our capacity to meet			
Centralisation risks disconnection between local Friends and national work – and of perceived focus on the 'central belt'			

Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

Experience elsewhere

The challenges faced by Quakers in Scotland are not unique, even if there are characteristics of our organisation and the geography that are particular to Scotland. We have spent time listening to and learning from the experience of Friends elsewhere.

We met with Friends directly involved in the changes under way in Wales and the Marches, London, Central England, Yorkshire and North-East England. These Friends were generous with their time and insights and we thank them. Having Lesley Richards as our Convenor, with her close experience of developments in Wales and the Marches, has been particularly helpful.

Further information about the approaches being taken elsewhere is available on the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#).

Themes and considerations

As we considered the available options, we explored all of the following themes, and we feel they should be taken into account as we move towards deciding what should happen next:

- *Quakers in Scotland already use varying ways to find community.* Many think in terms of geography, but some find greater affinity with Friends of a similar age (eg young people), or who share a concern (criminal justice, climate justice, peace or mental health and well-being).

We need to ensure that any new arrangements strengthen the opportunity for Friends from all of these communities to get to know and learn from one another.

- We know from experience that *Quaker worship, witness and service are inter-related* and that *our decisions are, and will be made under discernment*
- We need to *understand the roles and tasks that we require*, and how these can change. Some focus most on good governance and what society expects of us, while others are more about keeping our community moving with the Spirit.
- *It is realistic to assume that there will be increasing costs* incurred in obtaining professional advice and/or services. This is likely even if no changes are made to our structures. Care will be needed in how these costs will be met and ensure that they are sustainable. The following are areas of work that may be considered appropriate: eg accounting, property, safeguarding, recruitment & staff management, management and administration.
- *Quakers in Scotland is not a building or an address; it is all of us.* We thought a lot about whether a change in our structures would mean Friends are more isolated from activity and decisions undertaken in their name.

Our current arrangements involve only the small numbers of Friends who feel able to attend and are comfortable in our Business Meetings. Perhaps it is time to free up that space for new ways of gathering in community, allowing more to join in the life and work of Quakers in Scotland. Care will be needed to ensure that decisions based on our discernment are taken within Business Meetings, but this could lead to a greater inclusivity.

Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

- *Energy will be needed to nurture our faith community.* Friends like meeting face to face, but our habits have been affected by Covid-19 and concerns to avoid unnecessary travel in a climate crisis. Conversely, there are new ways to connect online. Can we support new ways of meeting and connecting in person, encouraging 'bottom-up' and communal opportunities to be more sociable and inclusive.
- *We will need to invest money, time and expertise in improving facilities across Scotland.* Some of our role-holders have already improved the sharing of expertise across Scotland. This can be extended to more specific tasks such as supporting LMs to equipment that makes connecting easier, while training and bulk licensing can be more cost effectively obtained.
- If a decision is taken to make significant changes to our organisational arrangements, then *the process of change* and supporting Friends through it will need careful consideration.

Where does this lead us?

As a group we began with very different ideas about what was needed, with some scepticism about whether change will improve things. Over time we have come to a united view about the way forward. We were appointed by GM because the status quo is fragile. We have heard the real concerns of Friends in AMs that find it hard to find ways to keep going, even that an AM might be laid down in the next year or so. For those whose experience is that we are managing well enough, we understand the concern not to lose what has served us well.

Our discernment is clear that our circumstances require a significant change to our organisational arrangements, and that we must better support those who serve in roles on our behalf. The changes we propose will not answer all concerns, but we believe they will make a difference.

Changes to organisational arrangements

We have come to discern that small changes will solve little and would make things harder in the long run. We can see significant benefits from a radically simpler approach where, in future, Friends will see themselves as belonging locally to their LM or worshipping group, and as part of the wider community of Quakers in Scotland (see diagram on the next page). As we have described above, we believe that this will create space for new ways of gathering to emerge, which are not constrained by being part of formal structures. Already we find that advocacy, inter-faith links and outreach are most likely to happen locally or nationally.

What we do is for now, not for eternity; Quaker structures in Scotland have changed considerably over the years. In 1945 there were 300 members in Scotland and two AMs. Some Friends already feel more a part of a community of interest than of a Local Meeting. Quakers in geographically isolated situations feel different from those who are close to a busy city meeting. Our task is to create a community of Quakers in Scotland that makes them all feel welcome.

Supporting the Friends we ask to serve our organisation and community

Those Friends who are willing to undertake roles that require substantial service will be better able to focus their time and energy where it is most needed if they are provided with professional support in undertaking routine tasks and access to advice on complex and sensitive issues.

Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

We have considered the potential costs of this and, based on insights from existing accounts and an AM treasurer, a total additional provision of between £9,000 and £18,000pa (based on current commitments) would need to be made to annual budgets should a single charity be established for Quakers in Scotland. Further detail is available on the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#).

The result of this investment should be seen, not in a financial return, but in the release of time and energy for Friends who are engaged in the work of Quakers in Scotland.

Other options

We do not support retaining the *status quo* because the fragility that led to our appointment will remain; the serious concerns expressed by some anxious Friends will not have been answered; and we will probably consume rather than generate energy.

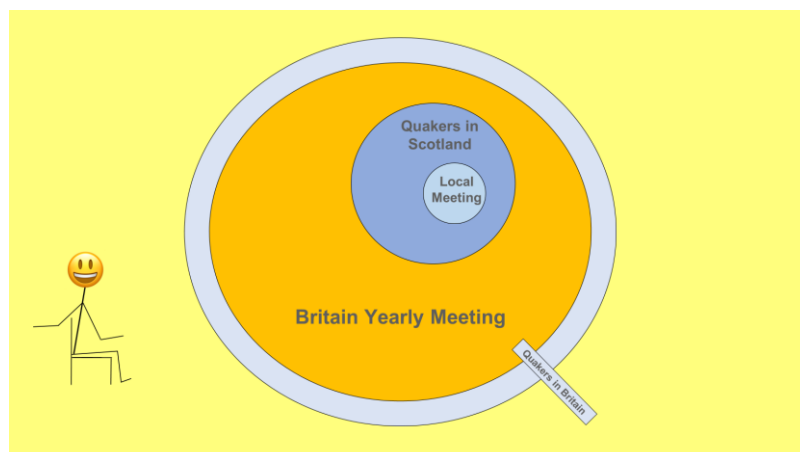
We gave serious consideration to *Option A* (reconfiguration of responsibilities between GM and AMs) as a less disruptive option, but have concluded that it is unlikely to resolve the challenges already present in the status quo.

We recognised that *Option B* (creating a single charity but making no change to AMs or GM) has attractions for many. However, we have come to discern that this will not resolve the full scale of the many other challenges we face, nor will it create the space to grow in different ways.

Recommendations

Therefore, we recommend that Area Meetings and General Meetings agree that:

- a single body, 'Quakers in Scotland' is formed through which we support all our Local Meetings, where our membership is held and which enables us to speak, as Quakers, on Scotland wide issues (*Option C*).
- a single charity (a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), is formed to be responsible for the stewardship of all our resources across Scotland.
- the use of paid professional support to undertake routine tasks and provide advice is further developed, easing the load for the Friends we ask to give the greatest practical ministry



Changing our structures for the future benefit of Quakers in Scotland

Making it happen

We have sought to balance the need to think through the practical implications of different options, without going beyond the remit set for us or anticipating the wishes of AMs and GM. If our recommendations are agreed, we do not underestimate the scale of work required, and it will not happen overnight. We have provided an outline of the likely timescale on the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#) based on experience elsewhere, from which we estimate two years is a not unrealistic estimate of the period ahead of us.

We have estimated costs and the reduction in the number of roles, imagined what a distribution of duties would look like in comparison with current arrangements, and considered areas requiring more detailed attention (eg charity changes, pastoral & spiritual care, nominations membership, marriages and funerals). If you would like to see more of that detail, then we encourage you to look at the background material on the [General Meeting for Scotland website](#).

We understand the reality being felt across Scotland of fewer Friends being involved for less time in the lives of our Meetings, and yet we also believe that it will be by involving more Friends in the process of change, that change will become real. Grasping the nettle, shaping our own future, can be invigorating and inspiring in and of itself.

By involving a wide selection of Quakers in Scotland in that work, will bring a wider appreciation amongst Friends of the implications and the opportunities this change will offer. How this will be managed will need careful thought, along with active and sensitive handling throughout the process, so that Friends feel informed, involved and invested in the future arrangements.

It is our belief that this can breathe new life into the community of Quakers in Scotland. Think it possible that we might enjoy ourselves in the process.

For now, we lay our report and our recommendations before you, Friends.

Options for Scotland Group

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