

Possible patterns of relationship between meetings of Scottish Friends

The following document has been created in response to the questionnaire sent out by the Quakers in Scotland Co-ordinating Group Community Subgroup. It aims to synthesise feedback we have received from Friends across Scotland and present possible future church government options in line with this. These options are being presented to General Meeting and Area Meetings, in line with GM's request for the QiSCG to "bring us proposals both for our future potential governance and how Friends within Scotland can work in community – i.e. the 'charity' and the 'church' aspects." (Minute 24/04/06 *Quakers in Scotland: proposals for a single Quaker charity/body*).

In the following list of structures, we have attempted to include an "at-a-glance" table to illustrate which level certain processes would be formally carried out at. These tables are intended to be quick guides, rather than comprehensive descriptions, which are contained in the paragraph text. A glossary fully explaining what words refer to which processes is appended. As part of their brevity, the tables exclude any mention of informal support groups for role holders. It is imagined in all cases that witness currently organised nationally, such as the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group, would continue to be done so.

The list entirely excludes consideration of any financial aspects of governance (i.e., treasurers, trustees and property) as this was not part of the community subgroup's purview. The list also excludes some structures that are not in keeping with our discipline. For example, we considered a hyperlocal structure, where only LMs and QiS existed and responsibility for Eldership, Pastoral Care and Membership are held at the local level. We were advised by the Recording Clerk, as 'keeper and interpreter' of the regulations surrounding church government (QF&P 8.21), that this hyperlocal structure is not in right ordering due to its potential for congregationalism.

Drafted by Robert Rayner, with contributions from Lesley Richards, 05/08/24.

1. The status quo

This model keeps the existing structure made up of GM, the four AMs and Dundee Friends Property Trust as six separate charities, operating as at present.

Advantages

It is understood.

Disadvantages

Two of the charities are on the point of collapse being unable to find sufficient trustees. Other AMs are struggling to find new AM clerks for when their current clerk's term of service comes to an end. There is no reduction in the number of role holders, nor relief for AMs who are struggling. In addition, worshipping communities who cross AM boundaries are unsupported. LMs which are in different AMs but geographically close feel separated.

	QiS	Intermediate	Local
Eldership and Pastoral Care		Nominated, Appointed	Suggested
Membership	Registered	Applied for, Visitors Appointed, Discerned upon, Recorded	Poss. Visitors Suggested
Clerking team?	Yes	Yes	Yes

2. The 'Welsh model'

The four AMs in Wales and the Marches together with Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales (CCQW) have set up a single charity, known as Cymar, to which they are in the process of transferring their assets. Only 3½ of the AMs are in Wales. All four AMs together with CCQW are regarded as constituent bodies in the constitution of the charity and will continue to operate as before, being responsible for all their usual business except that relating to trustee matters.

Advantages

It allows for a single charity but within an AM structure which Friends are familiar with. In Wales it copes with the complication that not all the Friends in the four AMs are members of CCQW, but that is not an issue in Scotland. It would deal with the problems faced by some of our AM charities.

Disadvantages

There is little reduction in the overall number of role holders required. It doesn't have a place within its structure for worshipping groups outside the existing constituent bodies or encourage the development of relationships across AMs. In these ways, it doesn't match what Scottish Friends have said they want in response to our questionnaire.

	QiS	Intermediate	Local
Eldership and Pastoral Care		Nominated, Appointed	Suggested
Membership	Registered	Applied for, Visitors Appointed, Discerned upon, Recorded	Poss. Visitors Suggested
Clerking team?	Yes	Yes	Yes

3. Only recognising QiS and LMs (Centralist)

Within a single charity Quakers in Scotland, there would only be Local Meetings, with no recognised intermediate level meetings. Membership, pastoral care and eldership would be administered (at least appointed at) from the QiS level, although LMs may still be involved in bringing names forward for these roles.

Advantages

There would be a significant reduction in the number of role holders. Discipline and unity would hopefully be easier to maintain. Discernment on membership and Es and PFs would be disciplined – there is a higher meeting that can say “no/not yet”.

Disadvantages

It doesn't have a place within its structure for worshipping groups outside the existing constituent bodies or encourage the development of relationships between LMs. Many Scottish Friends have said they desire an intermediate level for community building and learning. Many friends have said that a Scotland-wide body for considering membership and appointing Elders and PFs would be too remote.

	QiS	Intermediate	Local
Eldership and Pastoral Care	Poss. Nominated, Appointed	N/A	Suggested, Poss. Nominated
Membership	Applied for, Visitors Appointed, Discerned upon, Recorded, Registered	N/A	Visitors Suggested
Clerking team?	Yes	N/A	Yes

4. Intermediate meetings for community and learning which might host some 'in-between' QiS meetings

Friends expressed a wish for intermediate meetings for learning and community building. These meetings were variously described as optional, flexible, perhaps overlapping and not bound by current AM boundaries or geographical proximity but could be groups of meetings with a common interest or experience. Some Friends suggested that this was the best level to discern matters such as applications for membership at, while not having to deal with the full panoply of AM responsibilities. In option 4, this could be done by holding 'in-between' meetings of QiS. What is described here may be unfamiliar to Friends so this description will necessarily be longer; this option still fits within our discipline, as set out in Quaker Faith and Practice.

For it to be appropriate for any intermediate meeting for learning or community building meeting to undertake QiS business:

- It must be organised by a team comprising some mixture of Elders, Pastoral Care Friends and LM clerks to ensure Gospel order
- These Friends must come from at least three different worshipping communities to avoid congregationalism
- A Friend must be named to act as clerk so that there is clear responsibility for managing the business

- The meeting, with its agreed agenda, must be advertised and open to all Friends in QiS to permit any Friend to attend if they are so led

If an intermediate meeting wished to consider items of business that are the responsibility of QiS, they could approach the QiS clerk to designate part of their intermediate meeting as an in-between meeting of QiS. An in-between meeting would consider specific pre-approved items of QiS business which only closely concern Friends from the organising meetings. There is a balance between wishing to make decisions at a meeting appropriately close to those it most greatly affects, avoiding congregationalism and empowering Friends who want to be part of a decision-making process to participate in it.

Friends at a meeting of GM or an early meeting of QiS would need to work together to minute guidance on what matters might be appropriate to consider at such a meeting. Such guidance would describe what *could* be considered at an in-between meeting with the agreement of the QiS clerk, not what *must* be considered. The most obvious matter is receiving applications for membership, but other matters which Friends might consider suitable include membership transfer, appointing a chaplain to a local institution, writing testimonies, marriage arrangements and involvement in the appointment of Elders or Pastoral Care Friends. The agenda of an in-between QiS meeting would have to be written in accordance with this minuted guidance and agreed with the QiS clerk,. The QiS clerk would not need to attend an in-between meeting. The in-between meeting must follow the agenda agreed to and publicised by the QiS clerk, without additions. Unlike a scheduled meeting of QiS, Friends from elsewhere would probably not routinely attend an in-between meeting; the details of such meetings and their agenda must be publicised beforehand, so Friends can be sure whether there are any agenda items for which they feel led to be present.

The minutes of an in-between meeting would be full minutes of QiS and would need to be sent to the QiS clerk as soon as practicable after the meeting and shared in the same way as any other QiS minutes. These matters would not need to be minuted again at a 'regularly scheduled' meeting of QiS. There might be other items of business which are not part of the QiS agenda, for example, planning the next intermediate meeting for community and learning for that group; these would be considered in a separate part of the meeting and these minutes would not be minutes of QiS.

There is no necessity for Friends arranging an intermediate meeting for community and learning to seek to host an in-between meeting of QiS. Any QiS business relevant to the members of the intermediate group can still be taken at the next scheduled meeting of QiS.

Advantages

This option allows for the flexibility which Friends desire. Friends have said that they want to hold intermediate level meetings for community building and learning. Intermediate groups could be linked by geography or circumstance. This would eliminate the anomaly where LMs are close but separated by an AM 'border'. One LM could be part of several intermediate groupings. Pooling resources between worshipping communities would support role holders in carrying out their responsibilities. Having the *possibility* of holding in-between QiS meetings allows more local participation in discernment for those that think this is important, while freeing up intermediate groups where this workload would be a burden. It would also reduce the amount of business to be taken at regularly scheduled QiS meetings. There would be a significant reduction in the number of role holders.

Disadvantages

There would be a moderately increased workload for the QiS administrator and clerk. It could be unclear to attenders where their application for membership might be considered. Elders and Pastoral Care Friends might feel more pressure to organise community-building and learning activities (although this option does not place them under any necessity to organise such meetings). There needs to be more discernment on what matters these in-between meetings could consider.

	QiS	Intermediate	Local
Eldership and Pastoral Care	Probably appointed	Possible involvement	Possibly nominated
Membership	Registered <i>If taken at a scheduled meeting of QiS - Applied for, visitors appointed, discerned upon and recorded</i>	<i>If taken at an in-between meeting of QiS - Applied for, visitors appointed, discerned upon and recorded</i>	
Clerking team	Yes	Fulfilled by Es, PCFs and LM clerks	Yes

Glossary

Applied for – This meeting would receive an attender’s membership application

Appointed – This meeting has the authority to give final approval over a name brought to it

Discerned upon – This meeting has the power to admit someone into membership after careful discernment

Visitors Appointed – This meeting has the power to formally appoint visitors

Recorded – This meeting would welcome Friends into membership and record any births, deaths, marriages and transfers of these members

Registered – To comply with charity regulations, this meeting maintains a list of members

Nominated – This meeting, or its nominations committee, formally brings names forward for consideration

(Visitors) Suggested – This meeting, or its nominations committee, informally and non-bindingly suggests names for a higher body to nominate/appoint. For example, when an LM NomsCom suggests a local Friend as an elder to the AM NomsCom if it struggled to find a name.

Poss. – Possibly

Scheduled meetings of QiS - a meeting of QiS set up and clerked by the QiS clerk in the traditional way.