



# Quaker Committee Handbook

## 2025 edition



“Acceptance of service on a weighty committee should really depend upon an answering imperative within us, not merely upon a rational calculation of the factors involved.”

Thomas R Kelly, 1941,  
*Quaker faith & practice* 20.36





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# Quaker National Committees: Overview

## Yearly Meeting

*All committees and groups are ultimately responsible to Yearly Meeting*

## Yearly Meeting Groups

Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee  
Central Nominations Committee  
Agenda Planning Committee  
Yearly Meeting Elders  
Pastoral Care Group  
Yearly Meeting Nominating Group

*Active only at YM*  
Epistle Drafters  
Committee to Examine Minutes  
(‘Dots & Commas’)

## Meeting for Sufferings

Book of Discipline Revision Committee  
Church Government Advisory Group  
Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

## Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

BYMT Nominations Committee  
Employment Committee  
Finance, IT & Property Committee  
Internal Audit & Risk Committee  
Investment Committee

Planning & Prioritisation Committee  
Project Boards  
Quiet Company Board  
Reparations Working Group

## Standing Committees

Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations  
Quaker World Relations Committee

Quaker Peace & Social Witness  
Central Committee

Quaker Life Central Committee

Conciliation Group  
EAPPI Group  
QPSW Grants Group  
QPSW Standing Nominations Committee  
Solidarity Group *under Conciliation Group*

QLCC Nominating Group  
Quaker Life Rep Council  
Quaker Life Rep Council Planning Group  
Quaker Prison Chaplains Committee  
Young Adult Quakers Grant Group



Quaker committees are places where all Friends have the exciting chance to shape, manage and evaluate aspects of Quaker work, and give Friends a chance to work with others, both fellow committee members and staff, who share our commitment to faith in action.

This handbook is a practical guide to central Quaker committee service, aimed at both committee members and staff supporting them. It focuses on committees that support the central work of Britain Yearly Meeting, and doesn't cover local or area meeting governance. For matters relating to local and area meeting governance, contact [supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk).

*Quaker faith & practice* goes into much more detail about the spiritual aspects of committee service, as well as the structures in place. You may be interested in:

## **Chapter 3: General counsel on church affairs**

- Contains guidance and information on using the Quaker business method to make decisions (including in committee meetings) and goes into detail about clerking and nominations.

## **Chapter 6: Yearly Meeting**

- Details the history, function and work of Yearly Meeting and its committees.

## **Chapter 7: Meeting for Sufferings**

- Details the history, function and work of Meeting for Sufferings.

## **Chapter 8: The centrally managed work of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain**

- Outlines in detail how Quaker governance bodies operate, and how they support the central work of BYM.

## **Chapter 9: Beyond Britain Yearly Meeting**

- Touches on the role of more outward-looking committees, including Quaker World Relations Committee and the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations.

## **Chapter 14: Stewardship of our material resources**

- This chapter may be useful for those on committees that consider budget and resourcing questions, including Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and their sub-committees, and Quaker Life Central Committee.

## **Chapter 15: Trusteeship**

- This chapter contains useful context about the role of Trustees and their sub-committees.

# Part 1 – Our structures

This section focuses on the context in which committees operate.

a. Quaker committees explained

b. What sets Quaker committees apart?

c. How are Quaker committees held?



# Part 1 – Our structures



## 1a: Quaker committees explained

### Introduction

There are a wide range of committees which make up Quaker central governance, structured in several closely interlinked but distinct sections. Yearly Meeting in session and Meeting for Sufferings discern the work to be done. The Trustees serve the Yearly Meeting by ensuring that resources for this work are available. Yearly Meeting in session and Meeting for Sufferings consider the overall vision for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). Their discernment sets the framework for the overall programme of centrally managed work.

BYM Trustees serve the Yearly Meeting by ensuring that resources are made available to do the work. They oversee the operational side of the yearly meeting's activities, ensure that sufficient income is generated, plan for the future, clarify and rationalise the linkages and accountability between the work of committees at different levels and across the yearly meeting. Staff, led by Management Meeting, carry out the work decided upon by BYM's governing bodies.

The committees listed here from time to time set up subcommittees, networks, or working groups to carry out specific areas of work or to undertake particular projects.

All committees have terms of reference, which set out their scope and purpose, how often they meet and any other specifics around how they should operate. All committee terms of reference are available in the [Quaker Committee Hub](#).

**Important note:** *The information that follows reflects the current structure. From May 2026, Meeting for Sufferings will be replaced by additional sessions of Yearly Meeting. The handbook will be updated to reflect these changes.*

## Upcoming changes

At Yearly Meeting (YM) in May 2026, Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) will be laid down. The committees which are responsible to Meeting for Sufferings will continue, reporting to Yearly Meeting rather than MfS. These are:

- Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR)
- Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC)
- Book of Discipline Revision Committee (BDRC)
- Church Government Advisory Group (CGAG)

Yearly Meeting will begin to meet several times a year. Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee (YMAC) will be laid down and the Agenda Planning Committee (APC) will be responsible for discerning the agendas for YM sessions. In 2026 YM will meet in May, July and November. From 2027 onwards it will meet four times per year, usually in February, May, July and November.

At the time of writing, work is ongoing to prepare for the transition. New diagrams and explanations will be provided following Yearly Meeting in May 2026, and the Committee Handbook will be updated.

## Yearly Meeting (YM) and its committees

Britain Yearly Meeting in session is the final constitutional authority of the Religious Society of Friends in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. It is more commonly referred to simply as Yearly Meeting.

All Quaker committees are ultimately responsible to Yearly Meeting. Any Friend is welcome to attend and participate in the decisions made at Yearly Meeting.

**Groups active at Yearly Meeting** are generally appointed either slightly ahead of time, or at Yearly Meeting itself, working for the duration of YM. They include Epistle Drafting Committee, Pastoral Care Group, and Committee to Examine Minutes (known as 'Dots & Commas').

**Yearly Meeting Elders** work to offer a ministry of prayer, presence and counsel at Yearly Meeting, and are active throughout the year. They work to uphold the Quaker business method during YM session.

**Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees:** see page 11.

**Meeting for Sufferings:** see page 11.

**Central Nominations Committee (CNC)** have the job of finding the right people to serve as members of the majority of the committees covered in this handbook. There are several other nominating groups which appoint to specific committees, including:

- Britain Yearly Meeting Trustee Nominating Group
- Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) Standing Nominations Committee
- Yearly Meeting Nominating Group
- Quaker Life Central Committee Nominating Group.

## Meeting for Sufferings (MfS)

Meeting for Sufferings is the standing representative body for Britain Yearly Meeting. It meets quarterly and has delegated responsibility for decisions in between Yearly Meeting sessions. Every area meeting and some other key Quaker communities nominate a representative to attend.

Meeting for Sufferings appoints several committees which are not named in *Quaker faith & practice*:

- **Book of Discipline Revision Committee** is a fixed-term group set up to replace our current book of discipline (known as *Quaker faith & practice*). They are working towards offering a revised draft to Yearly Meeting in July 2027 so that Yearly Meeting can adopt a new book in 2030.
- **Church Government Advisory Group** draft necessary amendments to *Quaker faith & practice* and advise Meeting for Sufferings on matters relating to Quaker church government.
- **Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group** acts as an agenda committee for Meeting for Sufferings, supporting the clerks to discern upcoming agendas and review past meetings.

## Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (BYMT)

Britain Yearly Meeting is a registered charity and is therefore required to appoint trustees. They are appointed by Yearly Meeting in the same way as all its other committees. BYM Trustees make their decisions using the Quaker business method.

The primary difference between BYMT and other central Quaker committees is that BYMT are legally responsible for the centrally held and managed policies, property, employment and work of BYM. They are responsible for ensuring BYM's resources are used responsibly, and have oversight of the organisation's finances. Trustees work closely with staff to adopt an operational plan and budget every year, and are also responsible for overseeing risk management.

Where Yearly Meeting discerns the work to be done, BYMT ensure that resources are available to achieve this.

- **Quiet Company Board** is the governing body (Board of Directors) for BYM's wholly-owned subsidiary company, Quiet Company (QC). Like the trustees, they are a legal entity who have responsibility for the strategic oversight of QC.
- **BYMT Nominations Committee** is responsible for appointing members to trustee sub-committees.
- **Finance, IT & Property Committee** take delegated responsibility for the effective stewardship of the finance and property for BYM's central purposes, including property and strategic oversight of IT. They also oversee the annual external audit.
- **Internal Audit & Risk Committee** advise BYMT on internal compliance and financial controls relating to centrally managed work, and support risk management.
- **Employment Committee** has delegated responsibility for matters relating to the employment of staff, working closely with Management Meeting and the internal People team.

## Standing Committees

There are four permanent (or 'standing') committees who are appointed to oversee distinct areas of work. They work closely with staff to discern and guide the direction and focus of work.

- **Quaker Life Central Committee** works to deepen the experience of God's grace and its consequent expression in our lives and in all our meetings, and to enlarge the worshipping Quaker community in Britain.
- **Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee** promotes and undertakes action for peace and social justice in line with our testimonies.
- **Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations** is responsible for keeping Quakers in Britain informed of the various movements towards cooperation within the Christian Church and opportunities for interfaith dialogue.
- **Quaker World Relations Committee** acts as the main link with other yearly meetings and other Friends' groupings worldwide, particularly Friends World Committee for Consultation and its Europe & Middle East Section.

## Management Meeting

Management Meeting is the staff leadership team, led by the Recording Clerk and currently comprised of five permanent positions: Recording Clerk, Deputy Recording Clerk, Head of Witness and Worship, Finance Director and Quiet Company CEO, and one fixed-term position: Senior Change Leader: Quaker Governance.

Management Meeting is accountable to BYM Trustees. It is responsible for the coordination, management and implementation of all work as guided by BYMT and Yearly Meeting.



## 1b: What sets Quaker committees apart?

There are many aspects of serving on a Quaker committee which set the experience apart from service on non-Quaker governance bodies.

### Quaker Business Method

The Quaker Business Method is the process by which Quakers have been running their business meetings for over 350 years. A Quaker business meeting is essentially a meeting for worship, except that it has a pre-arranged agenda. The process is the same across all sizes and types of group, including committees.

A meeting starts with a period of quiet worship. The clerk then opens the business part of the meeting. As in a secular meeting, someone presents an item, and answers questions of clarification. But rather than debating the matter, the gathering then tries to discern, in an atmosphere of worship, what is required. The meeting will then close with another period of quiet worship.

“In our meetings for worship we seek through the stillness to know God’s will for ourselves and for the gathered group. Our meetings for church affairs, in which we conduct our business, are also meetings for worship based on silence, and they carry the same expectation that God’s guidance can be discerned if we are truly listening together and to each other and are not blinkered by preconceived opinions.” *Quaker faith & practice* 3.02

### Clerk vs. Chair

There are some similarities between the role of a Quaker clerk and that of a committee chair in non-Quaker settings. They are responsible for producing the agenda, guiding the committee through the meeting and act as the main point of contact for staff. However, they also write minutes during the meeting and take care that Quaker process is followed correctly.

Although the meeting gives the clerk certain authority in relation to the running of the meeting, the clerk does not have the power to make decisions on behalf of the meeting as they might in a secular setting.

Some committees or groups have a convenor instead of a clerk. The roles are very similar in practice. You can read more about conveners in *Quaker faith & practice* 3.21.

For more about the role of the clerk, see Clerking a national committee (page 25).

### Minutes

One of the most distinct elements of Quaker meetings is the process of recording the meeting. Quaker minutes are drafted by the clerk during the meeting. At the end of an item, the clerk will present the draft minute to the group, who are invited to respond. The minute is edited until the group feels it has captured the sense of the meeting. Once made final, the minute cannot be changed.

## The role of elders

Some committees – usually larger ones – might decide to appoint elders. Elders take responsibility for the spiritual side of the meeting, and for upholding the Quaker Business Method. It's not a role related to age or status, as the name might suggest. Elders can also provide pastoral care to committee members.

## 1c: How are Quaker committees held?

This section is applicable to committees, sub-committees and groups.

### Staff and committees

Committees and staff engage in a range of different ways. Each committee will have a clerk or convener, and a secretary or assigned staff member (see page 17 for a full description of roles). The degree to which the committee carries out work themselves, or guides staff in doing so, can differ widely.

Clerks and secretaries work closely together, collaborating regularly on the agenda, papers, minutes and business of the committee.

### Meeting dates

Most committees hold around four meetings per year, roughly once a quarter. The dates for these are set in advance for the upcoming year. Usually, the secretary or administrator will support the committee to find dates which are suitable for as many members as possible and will then issue diary invites by email.

Our committees rely on the attendance of its members, so it's important to communicate well in advance of the meeting if you are unable to participate. This is particularly important for residential meetings where rooms, meals and travel may have been booked in advance.

### Online meetings

The majority of Quaker committee meetings are now held online. This allows Friends who live across Britain to participate in a time- and cost-efficient way.

Most take place on Zoom, and some on Microsoft Teams. You can find a detailed guide of how to access Zoom and Teams on the Quaker Committee Hub Resources section. If you are struggling with the technology of online meetings, help is available from the committee secretary.

### On-site meetings

Each committee can usually hold one on-site meeting per year, usually held at the weekend, and sometimes as a residential. This might include an overnight stay of one night, or two in exceptional circumstances. Common locations for this are the Quakers in Britain offices in London, Leeds or Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria. These provide a chance for in-depth discussions, and to get to know one another on a social level.

## Use of the Quaker Committee Hub

The Quaker Committee Hub is the online portal for committees to access papers, resources and communicate to one another. It was developed to replace the use of QGroups and Microsoft Teams by committees, to improve the way in which we share information and to streamline processes for both members and staff.

A full guide of how to use the Quaker Committee Hub is available for new members from their committee secretary, and on the hub for those who already have an account. The committee secretary or administrator is on hand to help if you are having difficulty accessing or using it.

It is really important that all committees use the hub consistently. It has been specifically designed to accommodate the needs of all of BYM's committees, so if you feel there's something it isn't able to do, let the Governance team know (via your secretary if you are a committee member).

The hub can be used for:

- Accessing upcoming committee papers and minutes
- Accessing past papers and minutes (up to six years)
- Viewing upcoming and past meeting dates for your committee, including links to join the meetings
- Viewing a calendar of all committee meetings
- Finding the names of committee members
- Communicating with your committee, including creating forums.



## Part 2 – Your role

This part focuses on roles within committees, and what being on a committee actually involves.

- a. Roles and responsibilities
- b. Joining a committee
- c. Preparing for a committee meeting
- d. During the meeting
- e. After the meeting
- f. The end of committee service
- g. Clerking a national committee





### 2a: Roles and responsibilities

The Quaker Committee Hub contains a list of members on each committee page, including if they are a named role-holder.

#### Members

Most Friends serving on committees won't be named role-holders, but the role is just as important. Friends may have been nominated to a committee because they are a subject-matter expert, or because of other skills or experience which they bring to the group. Members are expected to share their insights on agenda items, as well as upholding the meeting, including the clerk and fellow committee members, through worship.

#### Responsibility matrix

There are lots of steps involved in making a committee run effectively, and it can be confusing to know who should be doing what. The below matrix aims to give an overview of everything involved in running a committee and those who have responsibility.

## Part 2 – Your role

| Action                                                                                                                                           | Clerk(s) | Secretary | Admin | Members | Elder |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|
| <i>Where elders are appointed, they are also members of the meeting. Here they have been separated out as they also fulfil additional roles.</i> |          |           |       |         |       |
| Draft meeting agenda                                                                                                                             | ✓        | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Draft meeting minutes                                                                                                                            | ✓        | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Finalise agenda and papers to be issued                                                                                                          | ✓        |           |       |         |       |
| Draft papers                                                                                                                                     | ✓        | ✓         | ✓     | ✓       |       |
| Upload papers to hub                                                                                                                             |          | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Issue papers to committee                                                                                                                        |          | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Read papers in advance of meeting                                                                                                                | ✓        | ✓         |       | ✓       |       |
| Attend meeting                                                                                                                                   | ✓        | ✓         |       | ✓       | ✓     |
| Write minutes during meeting                                                                                                                     | ✓        |           |       | ✓       |       |
| Review minutes ('dots & commas')                                                                                                                 | ✓        | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Circulate minutes                                                                                                                                |          | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Particular spiritual oversight of meeting                                                                                                        |          |           |       |         | ✓     |
| Specific pastoral support for members                                                                                                            |          |           |       |         |       |
| Complete expense claim form                                                                                                                      | ✓        |           |       | ✓       |       |
| Process expense claim forms                                                                                                                      |          | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Induct new members                                                                                                                               | ✓        | ✓         |       |         |       |
| Separates minutes to other committee secretaries                                                                                                 |          | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |
| Set meeting dates                                                                                                                                | ✓        | ✓         | ✓     | ✓       |       |
| Set up handover between old and new clerks                                                                                                       | ✓        | ✓         |       |         |       |
| Provide dietary and access requirements for on-site meetings                                                                                     | ✓        | ✓         | ✓     | ✓       |       |
| Relay dietary and access needs                                                                                                                   |          | ✓         | ✓     |         |       |

### Clerk

All Quaker committees have a clerk, appointed by the parent committee, the relevant nominations group or the committee itself (according to the group's terms of reference). They work closely with the appointed staff member to produce the agenda, write minutes and conduct the business of the meeting. In some cases, an assistant clerk will be appointed, or the role will be shared between co-clerks.

Sometimes the term 'convener' will be used in place of clerk, often in a small group which has been appointed to undertake a particular piece of work.

### Secretary

The secretary is a staff member assigned to support a committee. They work closely with the clerk to draft the agenda and sometimes the minutes, work with other staff and members to produce papers, and attend meetings. They are the primary link between committees and staff.

### Administrator

Some committees are supported by administrators as well as secretaries, who assist with the practical side of running a committee. They generally support with producing and circulating agendas, papers and minutes, arranging meetings and authorising expense claims.

### Elders

Some committees, usually larger ones, may decide to appoint committee members as elders. Their purpose is to oversee the spiritual side of the meeting, including ensuring the Quaker Business Method is being followed appropriately.

## 2b: Joining a committee

### Nominations and appointments

Quaker committee members are appointed through a process called nominations. For centrally-managed committees, this involves a designated nominations group approaching those who have either expressed an interest in serving on a committee, or who have been identified through their work at a local or area level. The nominations committee seek to discern spiritual gifts, matching the nominated Friends with vacant positions which suit their skills and interests.

Members are usually appointed to a committee for a two- or three-year term. There are exceptions to this, for example when the committee is focusing on a piece of work with a fixed term. There may be an opportunity to serve a second term. If you are a committee member and are unsure about the length of your term of service, get in touch with your committee secretary.

### Appointments within committees

Committees often need to appoint members to specific roles. This may include elders, buddies to support new members or representatives to attend another meeting.

A committee should generally follow the usual Quaker nominations procedure when appointing members to roles (see [Quaker faith & practice chapter 3](#)). Sometimes it may be appropriate for members to volunteer to do specific tasks – that is more likely to be appropriate for one-off tasks like writing a report.

Some committees will have a specific nominations committee or group. When that is in place, nominations required should be notified to the nominations committee, and they should be asked to come back to the full committee with suggested names.

Many committees will not need or want an ongoing nominations committee. In that case, when nominations are required then a small group should be formed to act as a nominations committee for that purpose. Often the clerks may be asked to suggest who should be on that small group.

In the same way, if there is a nominations committee then new or replacement members for that committee will usually best be found by asking a small group to find people. In a very small committee then things may need to be done differently, for example by inviting nominations from all members during a session.

### Inductions for new members

New committee members will have varying levels of experience, both in serving on governance bodies and in engaging with Quaker business. In recognising this, an induction plan has been designed to ensure that all members start their service from an equal footing.

The induction of new members is the joint responsibility of the clerk and secretary, who may call on the administrator to support.

When new members are appointed, the first thing they should receive is an email welcoming them to the committee and sharing a link and instructions about how to access the Quaker Committee Hub. This will enable them to view resources and training material, as well as meeting papers.

They should then be signposted to:

- Committee Handbook, which includes:
  - BYM Governance Structure
  - Practical tips on joining your first meeting
  - Data protection and safeguarding information
- Terms of reference
- Most recent papers and minutes
- Reminder of upcoming meeting dates and locations [these will have been issued at nomination stage]
- Key contacts
- Committee member biographies.

They should also be invited to offer times and dates for a welcome meeting between the clerk, secretary and new member. This should take place ahead of the next committee meeting, ideally within a month of the appointment. This meeting is a chance to:

- Put faces to names
- Open up channels of communication
- Enable the new member the chance to air any concerns or ask any questions
- Clarify anything unclear in the resources

The new member will be asked to write a short biography of a few lines to give their fellow committee members the chance to get to know them. With most meetings now held online, this is a small task which can make a big difference in supporting committees to work cohesively.

At their first meeting, the clerk should ensure that the new member is introduced to the group to help them feel welcomed and encouraged to participate.

## 2c: Preparing for a committee meeting

### Receiving and reading papers

A link to view papers in the Quaker Committee Hub will usually be issued around two weeks in advance of the meeting. If there are new papers after the link has been sent, another email will be sent out to flag this.

Committee papers will be formatted using the templates available on the Quaker Committee Hub. This is to ensure consistency across our committees.

Papers will be saved in the Hub file as numbered PDFs. They will always include an agenda, which sets out the running order of the meeting, as well as any papers relating to agenda items, and sometimes minutes of the previous meeting.

Everyone should take time to review the papers ahead of the meeting to ensure you are prepared to engage. This also enables any questions or concerns to be dealt with ahead of time.

### Practical considerations

The date, time and location of the meeting will be listed on the Quaker Committee Hub. If the meeting is being held online, the link will be available too. Make sure you know which platform the meeting is being held on, usually Zoom or Microsoft Teams. You may need to download some software to make this work. You can find resources to support you in doing this in the Quaker Committee Hub resources section.

If the meeting is held in person, travel should be booked as far in advance as possible to get cheap tickets. This can be claimed back as an expense (see page 29). Accommodation for residential meetings is usually booked by staff. If you are travelling for a day-long meeting and need accommodation on either side, this can also be requested.

If you know that you cannot attend a meeting, please let the secretary and clerk know as soon as possible – it may help avoid cancellation charges. It is natural that issues come up from time to time, but when we say we are “prevented” (the word Quakers use in minutes to show who was not at the meeting) there is an expectation that the reason for absence is a good one. It is helpful to give a brief explanation of what is wrong as that can help with future meeting planning. It’s also helpful to be clear whether the reason is confidential or can be shared with the rest of the committee.

### Meeting dates

Committee dates for the upcoming year should be set well in advance. The secretary and clerk should work together on this, ensuring the dates and times align with any related committees, other key dates (for example budget deadlines or Yearly Meeting) and the availability of members.

Once decided, the secretary or administrator should create an Outlook calendar invite from the Outlook calendar associated with their Committee Hub page, and invite:

- Committee members and support staff
- The email address associated with the committee page on the Quaker Committee Hub [Secretaries will have access to this]
- Organisation-wide committee calendar: [committees@quaker.org.uk](mailto:committees@quaker.org.uk)

## 2d: During the meeting

All committee meetings look different. There is a huge variety of work being considered, both between committees and from meeting to meeting.

Generally speaking, the meeting will begin with a period of silent worship – usually for a pre-determined amount of time. The clerk will then guide the committee through the agenda, inviting ministry and ensuring an appropriate amount of time is spent on each item, and presenting a minute for agreement before moving onto the next item.

The meeting will end with another period of silent worship, and a reminder of when the next meeting is due to be held.

On-site meetings tend to be held over more than one day. This gives the committee an opportunity to meet in person, socialise and spend longer discerning complex matters.

### Cross-committee work

Key to successful Quaker governance is the effective communication between different committees. All the committees involved in centrally-managed work are encouraged to work cooperatively where relevant.

Cross-committee communication happens formally by minutes. If a committee deals with a piece of business they think is relevant to another committee, or wants them to consider a question that has been raised, they will write a minute in their meeting. The minute will usually end with, “We send this minute to X committee.” When shared with the other committee by the secretary or administrator, this is referred to as a separated minute.

### Working as a subgroup or subcommittee

Lots of committees appoint small subgroups to carry out discrete pieces of work. While main meetings of committees or groups should always have a staff member present (usually the secretary) this isn't always needed with subgroups. The need (or not) for a staff presence should be agreed when the subgroup is set up – if in doubt, discuss with your secretary before holding meetings without staff.

In the instance that staff members are not present, it might be useful to appoint a convenor (formally or informally) who will manage setting the agenda, taking minutes and issuing the meeting details, including a meeting link. The secretary or administrator of the main committee can support them with setting up Zoom or Microsoft Teams links.

## 2e: After the meeting

### Receiving minutes

The minutes of the meeting are circulated once the meeting has finished, usually within a few days. While the minutes are agreed and finalised in the meeting, usually the clerk and secretary will review them for any errors and then issue a final version via the Quaker Committee Hub.

### Work between meetings

Actions may arise from the minutes of the meeting. If support is needed in completing these, get in touch with the secretary in the first instance.

Committee members may be asked to join a sub-group. These will usually be created on a time-limited basis, to consider a specific topic within a set time frame to produce a proposal or a paper to assist the committee in its consideration of the topic.

### Being outward facing

Committee members are strongly encouraged to share their experiences of serving on a central committee with their local meetings. As a committee member, you become an ambassador for the work, not only locally in your meeting and its area meeting, but also to other committees who may not always appreciate what your committee does. Some work that your committee handles will be confidential, so be mindful of this when sharing and if unsure, check with the secretary or clerk.

### 2f: The end of committee service

#### Ending your service

All departing committee members should provide feedback on their experience. This could be through a conversation with the clerk or secretary, or via a feedback form. This is a vital part of committee service which enables better nominations processes in future. At the end of your period of appointment, your service will end. Some committees will note this in their minutes.

#### Serving on other committees

If you are coming to the end of your service as a committee member, you are invited – and encouraged – to consider expressing your interest in continued service. Given the breadth of work undertaken by Quaker committees, this could be a way to expand your skills and understanding of Quaker central work, and to contribute what you have learned in your previous committee experience into a new area.

#### Leaving a committee before the end of your term of service

Sometimes a Friend needs to leave a committee before their term of service ends. In this instance they might consider talking to their committee clerk or secretary first. If the issue affecting them is temporary (e.g. particular life, work or family pressures), there may be an option to step back from active participation for a while.

If a committee member does need to end their service early, they need to ask to be released from service. This is an aspect of Quaker theology around appointments and service: formally it is the appointing body (e.g. Yearly Meeting) that can release committee members, and this needs to be recorded in a minute.

Committee members should email the clerk and secretary of their committee to ask to be released. They should also let the nominations staff contact know by sending an email to [nominations@quaker.org.uk](mailto:nominations@quaker.org.uk). The email should detail whether they want to step back immediately or at a particular point (e.g. at the end of the calendar year).

It is helpful to explain in broad general terms why they are seeking release – this helps the committee and the nominations committee to understand if there are wider issues at play. If possible, a conversation with the committee clerk and/or secretary about their experience on the committee can be useful.

It may take some time for the request for release to be agreed by the appointing body but that does not mean the committee member has to continue working until that happens. They should let the committee clerk and secretary know whether they want to be removed from circulation lists straight away (and be regarded as prevented from attending any meetings) or stay in the loop until their formal and official release.

#### Leaving an internal committee appointment

If a committee member needs to step back from an appointment within a committee (e.g. being an elder, or serving on a committee sub-group) but does not need to be released from service, they should contact the committee clerk and secretary.

### 2g: Clerking a national committee

#### Clerks, co-clerks and assistant clerks

Committees may have one clerk, multiple co-clerks, or a clerk and assistant clerk(s). This usually relates to the size of the committee: larger committees generally benefit from more clerking support, and on any committee the availability of members means it may be useful to spread the load.

#### Appointment as clerk

When a new clerk is appointed, the secretary, outgoing clerk and incoming clerk should find a time for a handover in advance of the first meeting. Some find it useful for the outgoing and incoming clerks to co-clerk one or two meetings as part of the handover.

In advance of your first meeting, you should familiarise yourself with the committee's terms of reference so you have a clear understanding of the group's agreed scope. You should also make sure you are familiar with the members of the group so you have a good sense of the skills and backgrounds represented.

#### Working with the secretary

The relationship between clerk(s) and secretary is at the core of effective national committee service. At the outset of either a clerk or secretary's tenure, a meeting to discuss how the two should work together, reviewing each role's responsibilities (using the responsibility matrix - see page 17) and getting to know one another is highly recommended. It may also be helpful to plan for the work required ahead of upcoming meetings.

#### Your responsibilities

The responsibilities of clerking a committee are primarily to manage the practicalities of agenda planning, run the meeting and draft the minutes. A good understanding of the Quaker Business Method is important, as outlined in *Quaker faith & practice* 3.12, "spiritual capacity for discernment and sensitivity to the meeting".

#### Setting the agenda

Preparation of the agenda is the joint responsibility of the clerk and secretary. Generally, the clerk suggests the items and liaises with the secretary to pull together an agenda to be shared with the group.

Items for the agenda may be generated from the staff team, minutes (separated minutes) from Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings or other committees, items from subcommittees or subgroups, reviews of ongoing work or suggestions from committee members. The clerk's role is to identify these items, ensure an appropriate amount of time has been assigned and, with the support of the secretary, gather and review papers for circulation.

At the start of the meeting the agenda should be offered for adoption. Be open to making changes if a significant reason is given.

## Part 2 – Your role

The agenda (as well as all other papers and minutes) should be written using the template provided to ensure consistency. These are available on the Quaker Committee Hub.

It is generally good practice to include an item on the agenda called “Time without staff”, especially for committees with the most significant governance responsibilities. This enables committee members to speak freely on matters without their secretary or other staff member present.

### Writing minutes

Minute-writing is the responsibility of the clerk. It is usually helpful for the clerk, secretary or administrator to draft parts of the minutes in advance, for example any factual background. This saves time in the meeting and allows the clerks to concentrate on the wording of the precise decision.

Some agenda items are important and need to be placed on the record but may not need discussion or discernment by the committee. These can be dealt with by minutes that are completely pre-drafted in advance of the meeting – this is called ‘being taken on draft minute’. The draft minutes could be shared with the committee in advance to save time. Examples of items that might be taken on draft minute include: a minute from another committee that does not require any action to be discerned or anything else that needs to be formally recorded but not decided on.

For a detailed guide on writing Quaker minutes, see Appendix 1 page 31.

The clerk should sign the minutes at the end of the meeting. As most meetings are now held online, it is sufficient to add a picture of the clerk’s signature in lieu of a ‘wet’ signature. Ensure that the secretary has the signed copy of the minutes to be archived.

### Gold papers

Committees are asked to keep gold papers, which are the responsibility of the clerk. These are papers and minutes that the committee considers are helpful for future reference in its ongoing work, e.g. decision-making or policy. The clerk may choose to ask the secretary to help identify and file these.

### Quorum

Quaker meetings do not have a set quorum, and if the meeting is well held then decisions taken should be considered valid. However, it’s important that the clerk has a sense of when there are too few members for those present to be confident that they are able to make decisions in right ordering. As a guide, meetings with fewer than half of the members present may benefit from being postponed. The clerk and secretary should take this decision jointly and can seek input from the committee members present.

### Between-meeting decisions

Sometimes decisions need to be made urgently, or between meetings. Each committee is able to decide on their own procedure for this. Clerks and secretaries have joint responsibility for producing this. It should include:

- the criteria for establishing whether an item of business needs a decision between meetings;

- which issues are delegated to the discretion of the clerks and/or the committee secretary;
- the circumstances in which individual members of the committee should be consulted;
- the circumstances in which a minute might be offered and agreed by email;
- and the circumstances in which a special or 'emergency' meeting of the whole committee would be justified.

Committee members should be informed of any between-meeting decisions as soon as possible, and the decision should be minuted at the next meeting.

### Safeguarding

When making decisions as a committee, it is essential to consider safeguarding at every stage. Safeguarding means protecting children and adults at risk from harm, abuse, or neglect, and creating an environment where their welfare is prioritised.

Where a committee is asked to make a decision that could have safeguarding implications, it is vital that the Safeguarding Officer is approached before the committee meeting. This will enable them to offer appropriate guidance to the committee. Advice from the Safeguarding Officer should be followed.

Some examples of when you may need to consider safeguarding in your decision-making:

- Planning events: ensuring venues are safe and accessible, ensuring appropriate supervision ratios and disclosure checks for staff and volunteers. In England and Wales these are available through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and in Scotland through Disclosure Scotland.
- Recruiting staff or volunteers: ensuring safer recruitment practices are followed, agreeing processes for disclosure checks, references, induction, and safeguarding training.
- Setting policies and procedures: ensuring any policies which are in your remit sufficiently consider safeguarding and whistleblowing policies, codes of conduct, and procedures for reporting concerns.
- Responding to incidents: discussing how to handle a safeguarding concern or complaint, and ensuring proper reporting to statutory authorities if required.
- Funding decisions: considering whether grants, projects, or services might create safeguarding risks (e.g. funding activities involving children without proper safeguarding oversight).

Full guidance and information can be found in the Britain Yearly Meeting Safeguarding Policy and in Safeguarding Procedures and Guidance for Staff and Volunteers, which are available on the Quaker Committee Hub.

## Part 3 – Resources

a. Tools and Information

b. Policies and guidance

Appendix 1: Writing Quaker minutes: a guide for national committee clerks





## 3a: Tools and information

### General support

As a committee member, your first port of call should be your committee secretary or administrator. If you have additional or more general questions, you can email [governance@quaker.org.uk](mailto:governance@quaker.org.uk).

### Expenses

All committee members are volunteers and are encouraged to claim reasonable expenses relating to their committee service. Expenses can be claimed for:

- Travel to and from a meeting
- Accommodation for the duration of the meeting
  - Usually accommodation is booked by BYM so this should only be necessary in exceptional circumstances, and you should let your secretary know in advance what you plan to book.
- Food and non-alcoholic drinks during your trip

Please be considerate of minimising costs where possible. For example, buying advance rail tickets and travelling off-peak if you can, or finding the best rate for any overnight stay.

The expenses policy for volunteers and committee members contains more details and can be found on the Quaker Committee Hub.

## How to file an expense claim

- Make sure you get a receipt for your expenses, as you won't be able to make a claim without them.
- Complete the volunteer expense form (available on the Quaker Committee Hub) and send it to your committee secretary alongside a photograph, scan or PDF of receipts for each part of the claim.
- The secretary or administrator will then process the claim and pass it to the Quakers in Britain finance team for reimbursement.

## Digital tools

There are a range of digital tools to support you in accessing papers, resources and meetings. These are all available on the Quaker Committee Hub.

The available guides are:

- How to use the Quaker Committee Hub  
*Also available from committee secretaries for those accessing the Hub for the first time*
- How to use Zoom
- How to use Microsoft Teams

## 3b: Policies and guidance

There is a library of policies, procedures and guidance documents which underpin the work of BYM, all of which are available to read in the Quaker Committee Hub.

Those which apply to the work of committee members have been linked below. If you think a policy is missing or out of date, let your secretary know.

### Policies

- Safeguarding policy
- Volunteer expenses policy
- Conflict of interest policy
- Volunteer policy

### Procedures

- Safeguarding procedures and guidance for staff and volunteers
- Grievances and complaints
- Whistleblowing
- Employment of members

### Guidance

- Data and confidentiality

### Appendix 1: Writing Quaker minutes: a guide for national committee clerks

The purpose of Quaker minutes is to record the decision of the meeting. As such, they need to be accurate and clear and expected actions need to be spelled out. Everyone in the meeting is responsible for listening to, and accepting the minute as an accurate record of the decision made. That is why the minute is read out for all to hear before being accepted. A useful question to consider before finalising the minute could be: is this minute a faithful record of our decisions and our intentions?

Good practice in Quaker minute-writing is good practice wherever it takes place. However, there are some aspects of minute-writing that are particular to national committees.

#### Policies and programmes

The agenda should be clear on the purpose of an item and what is expected of the committee: is it for discussion, decision or information? The minute should reflect this.

Minutes that initiate programmes of work or establish policies will need to express the action required clearly and concisely, and to make this clear within the minute.

There may also need to be an introduction to the topic, including references to relevant committee papers to make the context clear to those who were not at the meeting and who will be receiving the minute for information or for action. In some circumstances, it may also be helpful to include reference to the considerations that caused the committee to come to its decision.

#### Discussion topics

When a topic is on the agenda for initial exploration or general discussion, it is generally best to record simply that such a discussion has taken place, adding any specific points that might inform future work or that require follow-up. It will usually not be necessary to record every point that is raised. Sometimes it may be helpful to append notes of the discussion (for example if staff have been asked to prepare a follow up paper). If the discussion doesn't produce any specific outcomes, it can be helpful to record a general outcome.

#### Draft minutes

Drafting some or all of a possible minute in advance can be very helpful in saving time and improving the quality of minutes, especially during busy meetings.

The introduction to the business of most minutes is usually best drafted in advance. This way it can be checked for factual accuracy without the time pressure of the meeting. Similarly, if the minute needs to refer back to previous minutes then it will be easier to draft those references in advance.

Administrative matters such as nominations, the recording of the formal receipt of minutes from other committees or dates of meetings can often be most efficiently dealt with using a preprepared draft minute so as not to take up time in the meeting. For very simple minutes of

record it may be possible just to read the draft minute to the committee without any additional introduction or discussion being necessary.

The preparation of partial draft minutes can also be helpful for items where a decision is required. In those situations, the introduction can be pre-drafted in full, with a range of draft possible outcomes, to be deleted or included as appropriate. Those possible sentences should not be read out in advance. Where the committee is making a decision it will almost always be necessary to do some drafting in the moment.

The drafting of minutes in advance also gives the opportunity to consider whether a minute will need to be sent formally to other committees or groups for action or information. When sending minutes to other committees or groups, it is important to give some background as to why that particular minute is being sent and any actions the sending committee is expecting the receiving committee to take.

If draft minutes are prepared on behalf of the clerk by the assistant clerk, secretary or administrator, the clerk should ensure that they have read them and made any changes ahead of the meeting.

### Completing the minute

Recording a period of discernment into a minute can be a complex process. Clerks are encouraged to utilise a period of silence and ask their committees to uphold them in completing the minute. This can bring clarity and allow focused drafting.

While generally a minute will be worked on during a session, if a break is approaching the clerks may decide that the committee should have the break while the clerks continue to work on the minute. If you are drafting a minute at a multi-day meeting, the minute could be considered overnight, as long as substantially the same group of Friends as attended the meeting hear the minute. Sometimes it can be helpful to ask the committee to assist in finding the right words.

### Handling objections

Very occasionally, a committee member may disagree with a minute so strongly that they ask to be recorded as “standing aside from the minute”. Meeting for Sufferings has minuted:

“The practice of recording names of Friends standing aside from a minute of a decision is not part of this yearly meeting’s discipline and we do not see it as a solution to difficulties. More important is the tender, compassionate and humble search together for the grounds of our unity. We do not equate unity with unanimity and we realise we must care for those who are in disagreement over an issue which has been decided.” Minute 6 of Meeting for Sufferings, 5 June 1999

The task for the clerk is to be clear about why the Friend feels this way. Do they have a clarity of understanding that is not available to the clerk, or are they committed to a personal opinion to the extent that they are unable to hear the sense of the meeting? In some cases, once it has been made clear that standing aside is not an option, a period of prayerful silence may help the Friend involved to unite with the minute. Where the Friend continues to feel disaffected, a committee elder or other members may wish to offer them support after the meeting has finished.

### Confidential minutes

On occasion committees produce minutes which concern individuals or reflects an issue which should remain confidential. This could include matters relating to staffing, safeguarding or budgets. In this case, a confidential minute can be drawn up that will be circulated only to the members of the committee. In the minutes circulated more widely (if applicable) there should be an indication of the subject matter and a note underneath indicating that the minute is confidential.

All committee minutes are subject to Subject Access Requests under GDPR, so be mindful of references to named individuals.

### Signing the minutes

As the majority of committee meetings are now held online, the clerk will be asked by the secretary to electronically sign the minutes after the meeting. The secretary will then ensure the final version of the minutes is saved, circulated and archived appropriately.



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