

Quaker recognised bodies: an overview

In December 2015, Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) agreed to replace the listed informal group system with Quaker recognised bodies (QRBs). The new approach will clarify the benefits and responsibilities for each body, and for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM).

This paper explains the context and options for a Quaker group considering whether to register as a QRB with Britain Yearly Meeting.

1. What is a Quaker recognised body?

A QRB is an independent group of Friends (and others) who explore a common interest, seek affirmation or carry out witness. It wishes to be recognised as a Quaker organisation because its Quaker roots are important to its identity.

2. Why are Quaker recognised bodies replacing listed informal groups?

The listed informal groups structure no longer fitted the variety of Quaker bodies in Britain. So the designation of 'listed informal groups' was laid down and the structure of 'Quaker recognised bodies' was formally adopted. The QRB structure will offer more appropriate mutual support. It will clarify the benefits that groups can expect, as well as the responsibilities groups accept from BYM.

It matters to Friends, and to the Society corporately, that these groups uphold a Quaker ethos – core Quaker ways and values. This is particularly relevant for groups whose work could be seen as representative of Britain Yearly Meeting. Groups' passion and commitment to an area of interest both strengthens and deepens the life of the Society and can breathe energy into more formal structures. The introduction of QRBs marks the emergence of a community that explores new ways to "meet together and know one another in that which is eternal" (Quaker Faith and Practice 2.35).

3. What is the purpose of registration as a Quaker recognised body?

Any group, including groups that were listed informal groups, will go through the same registration process. The purpose of registration is to:

- establish clear relationships
- recognise benefits and responsibilities
- promote the visibility of groups in the Society
- support a community that celebrates its mutual richness and upholds the accountability of its members to each other and the Society in ways that are explicit yet fair and transparent
- recognise the BYM staff member who will act as a staff link for the group
- acknowledge and uphold the Quaker ethos of the group's activity

- confirm the nature of the group and its participation within QRB structures.

4. Can any group register?

Registration is intended to be as inclusive as possible. As outlined above, all groups that are registered will uphold a Quaker ethos. Registration is granted by minute of MfS, and this *is* required for groups that wish to become a QRB. A group is eligible to register if its Quaker values and witness are upheld through its objectives, governance and arrangements:

Objectives might include one or more of the following:

- providing a discerned Quaker voice and action on a topic (theological, political, social or environmental), or geographical area,
- offering Friends an opportunity to develop a Quaker perspective on a topic,
- providing practical and spiritual support to Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting or to the Society as a whole, whether in Great Britain or overseas,
- providing services founded on Quaker values.

Governance and arrangements means:

- having aims, purpose and manner of proceeding consistent with Friends' testimonies, such as ways of running business meetings and nominations
- appointing a clerk who is a member/attender of an area meeting, and a treasurer;
- confirming the group's Quaker ethos through its ways of working, and through its management committee, trustees or governors (as applicable) being members/attenders of an area meeting. Non-Quaker members of QRBS are also welcomed for the richness and insight they bring from other sources;
- holding a meeting at least once a year;
- being accountable for funds held from subscriptions or donations.

New and emergent groups (not yet ready to meet the criteria for registration) may request temporary listing for up to two years until they are ready to register in full.

5. What type of Quaker recognised bodies are there?

Registration offers four different options for eligible groups:

- **Emergent** groups. Temporarily listed for up to two years. In this period they are usually be treated as gree-standing groups.
- **Linked** groups. Linked by minute from (or appointed by) part(s) of the formal structure of BYM such as: area meetings, central committees, MfS, General Meeting for Scotland, Meeting of Friends in Wales etc.

- **Free-standing** groups. Quakers who have come together to learn about or work on a particular topic. Groups are likely to have members who are geographically dispersed; with membership open, but not necessarily restricted, to all interested Friends and attenders.
- **External** groups (regulated externally). Set up with a board or management committee, a clear constitution and regulated by an external body such as the Charity Commission, the Scottish Charity Regulator, Companies House (where a charity is also a registered company), Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission etc.

6. How does registration work?

The application form for registration as a QRB is available via www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups or from the Recording Clerk's office at Friends House.

A linked member of staff will work with each group to prepare the registration information. Once that staff member has all the relevant information, a summary of the application will be sent to MfS. The eligibility of the group will be considered based on the details supplied. If the group is eligible, MfS will be asked to make a minute granting registration, and the information will be lodged in the Friends House Library.

7. What are the benefits and responsibilities of registering?

Registering as a Quaker Recognised Body offers benefits and brings responsibilities.

Benefits will vary from group to group, and can include:

- helping Quakers to know about the group and its work
- support from a Britain Yearly Meeting staff link
- discounts on Friends House facilities
- information sharing and joint activities
- advice and support from staff or committees.

Because there are many demands on BYM resources and staff time, support needs to be discussed and agreed; it cannot be unlimited.

Responsibilities will vary depending on the type of group. All Quaker recognised bodies are expected to:

- uphold a Quaker ethos
- follow the Meeting for Sufferings speaking out policy
- respond in a timely way to requests from their staff link for information
- proactively inform their area meeting clerk, oversight committee and/or Britain Yearly Meeting staff link of any potential issue involving reputational risk to the Religious Society of Friends.

8. Relationship between QRBs and BYM

QRBs need to ensure proper oversight and accountability:

- **linked** groups are expected to share their annual report and accounts (or summary of their activities and funds) with their area meeting and their staff link;
- **external** groups are asked to confirm that their audited report and accounts are publicly available through external regulators;
- **free-standing** and **emergent** groups are asked to forward a summary of their activities and funds to their Britain Yearly Meeting staff link (in consultation with any relevant bodies such as area meetings or Quaker Stewardship Committee).

9. Review

Each group will be registered for a fixed period. The BYM staff link and the group will work together to review the arrangement, before asking MfS to grant registration for a further period.

A group may cease to be eligible if its activities or constitution has changed in a way that would make the group ineligible to meet the initial registration criteria. A group may request to be removed from the register of QRBs at any time. This will be done by writing a minute, which will then be passed on to the Britain Yearly Meeting staff link, who will send it to MfS.

10. Suggestions for collaborative working

Quaker recognised bodies may have knowledge, skills and contacts that complement those of central staff. Where possible, recognised bodies and Britain Yearly Meeting are encouraged to share skills, working together to strengthen and increase Quaker worship and witness.

In some instances, QRBs may be able to use their skills, flexibility and energy to assist the yearly meeting; for instance, a QRB could provide a test-bed for a central committee to initiate new ways of working and witness. Some recognised bodies may be able to develop joint projects with central committees and staff.

11. Contact details for queries

Website: www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups.

For any queries, please email groups@quaker.org.uk or contact:

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