



Quakers in Britain
Friends House
173 Euston Road
London NW1 2BJ

16 July 2025

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your email dated 26th June 2025, concerning the [Statement of policy on provision of trans-inclusive facilities on BYM's estate](#), published in May 2025. As Trustees hold responsibility for overseeing the management of BYM's estate and for setting policy, we, Marisa Johnson, Clerk, and Kit King, Assistant Clerk, are responding on behalf of BYM Trustees.

We are responding to you personally given that, as you highlighted, Sex Matters to Quakers is not a Quaker Recognised Body, and therefore there is no relationship of accountability between BYMT and it – we are accountable solely to Yearly Meeting. We respond to you as a matter of courtesy.

Your email was addressed to Marisa and Paul Parker, Recording Clerk. However, we note that you had blind copied it to numerous Friends, staff members at BYM, and it was shared with other individuals by it being posted on social media and by some recipients forwarding the email on. We find this to be an attempt at lobbying by stealth, outside the discernment discipline of the Yearly Meeting, and an unhelpful method of communication – as outlined in *Quaker Faith and Practice* 03.04. In light of this and not knowing exactly who has received your initial email, we plan to publish this response in order to reach the same audience. Your name will not appear in the public version of this letter.

The consideration by Trustees which led to the statement of policy was based on the following principles:

- Upholding Minute 31 of Yearly Meeting 2021, particularly the sentence which reads “*We seek to provide places of worship and community that are welcoming and supportive to trans and non-binary people who want to be among us. Belonging is more than fitting in.*” Friends House is both a place of worship and a place of community. Uniting with this minute reflects the will of God as discerned by Yearly Meeting in session – the final constitutional body of Quakers in Britain. As Trustees, we are duty bound to honour the wishes of the Yearly Meeting. Therefore, in order to support and welcome trans and non-binary people into Friends House, we had to make sure there were sufficient toilets for them to use.
- Ensuring safety and protection of all users of the building, particularly women and girls. We wanted to ensure that the high standards of safety for women and girls in Friends House, that have been upheld since it opened in 1927, were maintained. Safeguarding is central to the way we operate at Friends

House, and across our wider estate, and taken very seriously by all staff, volunteers and committee members. Quiet Company staff (as the staff members in customer-facing roles at Friends House) are trained to deal with any incidents of unacceptable behaviour as part of their induction.

- We wanted to ensure that no matter who you are, you are able to access the facility you need while in Friends House. This required us to find a solution which provides sufficient toilets for cis men, cis women, trans men, trans women, non-binary people, intersex people, children, disabled people, and staff. There are only so many toilets, and with restrictions on time, it was not possible to make material change to the physical structure of the toilets before the start of Yearly Meeting. Therefore, only the labelling could change.

We would also like to explain the legal frameworks and impact on rights which BYM Trustees considered in determining our approach to the toilet and hygiene facilities available to members of the public at Friends House.

The EHRC's interim guidance contains the following point, which was instrumental in determining our approach: "It is not compulsory for services that are open to the public to be provided on a single sex basis, or to have single-sex facilities such as toilets. These can be single sex if it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim."

As well as the recent Supreme Court Ruling in respect of the Equality Act 2010, the legal landscape includes the continuing existence of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 and all the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 in respect of the protected characteristic of Gender Reassignment (at all stages of the process)

There were a number of approaches which could have been taken in response to the guidance. These were:

- Asking trans and non-binary people to use the accessible toilet facilities.
 - Given the relatively high number of people attending Yearly Meeting who identify as trans or non-binary, we felt that this would result in a disproportionate erosion of rights for attendees with access needs. Moreover, it would single out a whole group of people for treatment that would identify them as "different" and effectively "out" any trans or non-binary person who had not chosen to disclose their status.
- Asking trans or non-binary Friends to use the toilet for their gender assigned at birth. This approach held three risks:
 - The first is that it amounts effectively to a requirement to trans people to disclose their trans status by using toilet facilities which do not align with their gender presentation, or to behave untruthfully by not complying. We considered this an assault on trans dignity.
 - The second is an unintended consequence, which is that by creating a situation in which trans men, whose gender presentation is male, are using female facilities, this created an increased risk of harm to any woman likely to be triggered by the presence of a male person, and that cis men could also use female facilities unchallenged, by claiming to be trans men.

- The final risk we anticipated was having to introduce the policing of gender presentation within the building and within the community. We determined that this was an incursion on the rights both of trans and non-binary people, and of cis people of either sex, particularly those who present outside of traditional gender norms. Moreover, it is unclear how such verification would be carried out and by whom.
- The final alternative was to ask trans and non-binary people only to use the self-contained facilities on the second floor (or a combination of this and using the accessible facilities).
 - Again, this approach may have had the undesirable effect of outing trans and non-binary attendees and “other” them.

We considered also the impact of the arrangements on the rights of cis women.

- We considered that the proposed arrangements did not present an unacceptable risk to women or to women’s rights on the basis that, in regard to the largest and most used toilet facilities, the proposals left the groups of people who were able to use each set of toilets unchanged from previous years. Indeed, there are some trans women Friends who have been using these facilities for decades.
- As an added consideration, the labelling which made explicit the pre-existing norm gives women the opportunity of making an informed choice about which facilities they use.
- We know that most cis women Friends in the Yearly Meeting are supportive of trans inclusion.
- We have not ever been made aware of an incident of harassment or assault occurring in or around the toilets in Friends House at a Yearly Meeting event (or indeed at any other time) and therefore judged the risks of this occurring to be low. This is all the more so at Yearly Meeting, where toilet usage is high and the facilities are generally busy. Nevertheless, we felt it appropriate to take a robust Safeguarding approach to the possibility of any misconduct taking place, and stated in the guidance we gave at Yearly Meeting that any reports of inappropriate behaviour, as well as any harassment, would be dealt with swiftly, including reporting to the police if necessary.

Knowing that, as a result of refurbishment earlier in 2025, there were self-contained and therefore single sex facilities available in Friends House, we discerned that it was acceptable for the ground floor facilities to be provided on a trans-inclusive basis. After careful discernment and heartfelt ministry expressing a range of views, Meeting for Sufferings has since united with our approach in minute MfS/25/07/09, which partly reads:

“We affirm the importance of continuing to offer trans inclusive spaces, as we seek to offer safe spaces to everyone. Where necessary we will speak out to ensure that the law allows us to do this. We believe that it is essential that the protections in the Equality Act are implemented fairly and equitably.

We have heard the pain and fear of trans people and their families as their rights are conflated with the fears of abuse from men against women. We also recognise that there are women who have fears for their own personal safety. We seek to find a way to be in loving community, accepting one another. As a yearly meeting, we have a clear commitment to welcome trans and non-binary people in our meetings.

The world is becoming more hostile for gender nonconforming people and we need to work hard to make our welcome real and model it for the world. We need to uphold one another as we seek truth, unity and love together, through our processes of Quaker discernment. Violence comes from fear, and love drives out fear. Spiritually-grounded conversations and opportunities for learning from our lived experiences will aid this; we hope that ways will be found to facilitate this.”

Nonetheless, the approach we took needed to be tested through usage. The first event to take place after this policy was written was Yearly Meeting, so we were able to seek feedback not only from users of the building, but from several hundred members and attenders of the Religious Society. The Yearly Meeting evaluation form included questions which asked specifically about the provision of toilets. Therefore, this feedback is not only reflective of a diverse range of users, but it can also give us an insight into the thoughts and feelings of the Religious Society’s response to this policy. Feedback on the situation and how it was handled was overwhelmingly positive, and 96% of respondents attending at Friends House said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the approach taken. Many went out of their way to thank us for it. It is worth noting that of the remaining 4%, some put their dissatisfaction down to the fact that we had not made all the facilities gender-neutral. The number of negative comments received were less than two in one hundred. That is not to dismiss this 2%, as all feedback is taken seriously, however it does tell us that a very large majority of Friends at Yearly Meeting were in unity with the policy.

Lastly, we found the language in parts of the document which you shared with us and some of the rhetoric shared online to be offensive and transphobic.

Whilst we accept that Friends are free to hold beliefs that might not be shared by others, and we respect the right of holding such beliefs, insistence on sex being binary ignores the existence of intersex conditions, and the complexity of the interaction of genes, chromosomes, hormones, and morphology in determining a person’s presentation and felt identity.

In particular:

- Deliberate misgendering of a person is transphobia.
- Referring to trans women as men is transphobia.
- Assuming a trans person poses a risk simply for being trans is transphobic.
- Stating that trans men are vulnerable and “groomed” into transition is a transphobic trope.

- References to “trans activism” as anything other than the legitimate effort to protect and advocate for the rights of people who are trans or non-binary is transphobic.
- Alleging that Quakers have been “infiltrated” by trans activists is a transphobic conspiracy theory and we are particularly offended by it.
- The notion that supporting and advocating for the safety, wellbeing, and inclusion of trans people could be damaging to the Religious Society’s reputation, or even “might be the thing that finally destroys them” is shocking and dangerous. It is fearmongering, threatening, and extreme.

We have set out in detail the principles and process we have used in coming to our decision, which at every stage has been underpinned by discerning the will of God and the commitments already made by the Yearly Meeting. We will continue to monitor external developments and respond appropriately.

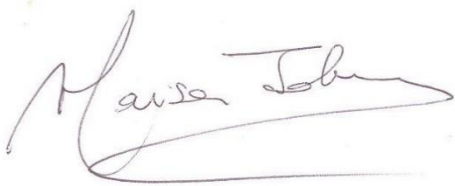
We know there are a number of Friends such as yourself who are not in unity with our discernment. As stated several times during Yearly Meeting 2025, unity is not unanimity. To quote from the epistle of Britain Yearly Meeting 2024:

“As Britain Yearly Meeting, we have minuted commitments in recent years: to care for our planet, to become an anti-racist church, to make reparations for historical injustices, to welcome and affirm those who are transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse. Much work has been done on all these by some individual Friends and Quaker meetings, as well as by our yearly meeting staff and committees. However, some have disagreed with the actions and approaches of others. This has been a cause of pain and anguish. We have heard in ministry that the strength of a church lies in how it is able to disagree with itself. In Quaker discernment, unity is not the same as unanimity. Minority views may well continue to exist. Among ourselves, we need to find kinder ground for our disagreements.

Can we find joy? Can we bring joy?”

We believe we are being faithful to the will of the Yearly Meeting. We regret that, sadly, unanimity is not possible on this issue and kinder ground eludes us.

In Friendship,



Marisa Johnson (she/her)
Clerk



Kit King (they/them)
Assistant Clerk