



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Our Principles – Revised [Further Revision June 2021]

This version includes additions and amendments based on the review of our principles at our March 2021 committee meeting, and on reflections arising from consideration of the Advices and Queries generated by our conference at Woodbrooke in late 2019.

1. Content

Spiritual underpinnings

1.1 All core content should have a clear link to Quaker spiritual experience and practice.

1.2 Content should make clear why we do what we do, especially the spiritual basis of our processes and structures.

1.3 Content should be underpinned by a narrative reflecting this spiritually-based Quaker way and this will guide our choice of which anthology material to use and where.

Reflecting the diversity of our community

1.4 We want to hold all things with love and respect especially in points of difference.

1.5 The text may express multiple points of view, but we should not shrink from expressing any point of view at all.

1.6 Use of the anthology model embodies the value we give to community, and models this.

1.7 We want to introduce a diversity of experience, which reflects the experience of people who have directly lived with the topic/issue.

1.8 We want our church government text and the other material we write to model inclusivity, recognising that it is our job to describe the structures and practice, not to create or change them.

Language, Tone and the Voice of the Book as a whole

1.9 'Because' should be a key word for us and we shouldn't assume any knowledge.

1.10 Recognise and be aware of unwritten assumptions and think about what needs to be articulated in order to be fully understood.

1.11 We need to be clear about the voice we want to use.

1.12 We acknowledge the tension between clear and poetic language and want to use both appropriately.

1.13 Language should be plain and intelligible, and any unfamiliar specialised words or expressions should be explained in context. We should give thought to effective use of a glossary.

1.14 The tone should be peer-to-peer, in it together: not from on high but being honest about difficulties.

1.15 We need to be clear when a particular position has primary authority for Quakers in Britain and is prescriptive, and when local variation and diversity are encouraged or reflected in guidance and descriptive material. The tone should reflect that authority, prescription, guidance or description as appropriate.

What to include (and where)

1.16 The book should tell the story of the Quaker journey so far.

1.17 "Church government" and "anthology material" (content which expresses our experience and understanding through selected quotations) should not be seen as completely separate types of text: rich spiritual experience infuses both. Quotations may enhance church government material: we need to clarify their function, frequency and significance.

1.18 The way core material refers to structures should allow for flexibility and potential for change.

1.19 Core states principles (the why, including the spiritual basis and the what - our core spiritual practices); supplementary gives details (the how).

1.20 The book should provide guidance in applying Quaker practices of discernment; it should not attempt to be an encyclopedia of Quaker views on all topics.

1.21 The book should strive to provide an up-to-date reflection of Quaker concerns and engagement with key issues in a way that will not quickly become dated and irrelevant.

1.22 Not everything has to be in the book: there are and will be other sources.

1.23 When using quotations we should be aware of their source, and not use them in ways that distort or obscure their original context.

1.24 We should be careful not to think only in terms of text. Content should integrate both text and non-text material; the book should be attractive, and inviting to those who may have difficulty with text.

General Principles

1.25 We want to be inclusive, and should take care not to exclude unintentionally.

1.26 Accessibility is a priority for both content and format.

1.27 Not everything is linear and we shouldn't force it to be. We can be creative with different formats.

1.28 Our job is not to set Yearly Meeting theology on, for example, Christian and non-Christian beliefs, but to describe the range.

1.29 The authoritative basis of the text, as approved and adopted by Yearly Meeting, should be made clear.

1.30 The book is primarily for Britain Yearly Meeting, but should be inviting to others and reflect our place in the wider family of Friends.

1.31 We should consider our commitment to simplicity and sustainability when planning the layout and publishing format of the book.

2. Process

Process for our committee

- 2.1 Hold all things with love and respect, especially in points of difference.
- 2.2 We must be tender with each other as we move forward with this work.
- 2.3 Our process should reflect the practice we are trying to express.
- 2.4 We want to be inclusive, and should take care not to exclude unintentionally.
- 2.5 It is ok not to know or to be unable to complete a task, or to adapt it to your way of working.
- 2.6 Accessibility is a priority.

Process for developing the content

- 2.7 We don't want to start from the constraints of the current chapters: themes will emerge.
- 2.8 We don't create answers ourselves: if the current position is unclear, we should seek advice from Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings or the appropriate committee.
- 2.9 We need to take everyone with us, for example through a grounded introduction of formats, access routes etc.
- 2.10 We want the revision process to be part of a process of dialogue that will improve the life of the Yearly Meeting.
- 2.11 Our process should be inclusive and accessible.
- 2.12 We should take care to ensure that any material suggested for inclusion is appropriately referenced.