# **New economy reading group programme**

# **Session plan: Booklet 1 – what is the economy for?**

*A note on how to use these session plans:*

This plan is written for session facilitator(s) rather than for the whole group.

Facilitators are the people hosting and running the meeting. They do not need any expertise whatsoever on economics. They will also take part in all meeting activities where possible.

This plan is intended as a guide to help you run useful sessions. If parts of the plan are not relevant to your group, then feel free to discard or change them! Do whatever works best for your group.

## Agenda outline

*This plan contains different options for how to structure the session. Below are two proposed ‘agendas’ which contain difficult combinations of the activities listed. You should choose the agenda which best suits your group.*

**Option 1:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Activity** | **Time (in minutes)** |
| Introduction | 1. Welcome | 3 |
| 1. *Optional:* Silence / worship | variable |
| 1. Introduction | 2 |
| Exploration | 1. Check in | 20 |
| 1. Question | Variable |
| Closing | 1. How confident do you feel about economics? | 15 |
| 1. Closing | 5 |

**Option 2:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Activity** | **Time (in minutes)** |
| Introduction | 1. Welcome | 3 |
| 1. *Optional:* Silence / worship | variable |
| 1. Introduction | 2 |
| Exploration | 1. Check in (optional) | 20 |
| 1. Does our economy support wellbeing? | 50 |
| 1. The aims of economic policy | 20 |
| Closing | 1. How confident do you feel about economics? | 15 |
| 1. Closing | 5 |

Note: You can add a break for tea and coffee mid-way through activity 6, or between two ‘exploration’ activities.

## Materials needed

Tea, coffee / refreshments (if you decide you want them)

Post-it notes

Optional: Handout sheet for activity 5 (see appendix)

Paper copies of Booklet 1: What’s the economy for?

Paper copies of *Principles for a new economy* (optional)

## Session plan

**Introductory activities**

1. **Welcome and introduction (3 minutes – not including worship time)**

You may want to offer people tea and coffee as they arrive. Make sure everyone has a comfortable place to sit. Chairs should be arranged in a single circle.

At the start, thank everyone for coming, introduce yourself if anyone doesn’t know you and begin the silence / worship.

1. **Silence / worship**
2. **Introduction to the session and housekeeping (5 minutes)**

Welcome everyone, and thank all those involved in organising the session. If there is anyone new in the room (who wasn’t at the first session), suggest that everyone in the room goes round the circle and introduces themselves briefly (saying their name and one brief detail, such as where they’re from).

Once this is done, outline the agenda for today (see agenda outline above). Explain that the aims of today are to have a chance to discuss some of the ideas in the first new economy booklet, *What’s the economy for?*.

It is assumed that people will have read booklet 1 (*What’s the economy for?*) in advance. If people haven’t, it’s not the end of the world for this session as it explores with open questions. But for future booklets, reading in advance of the sessions will be more important.

If there is anyone new in the room (who wasn’t at the first session), emphasise again that no prior economic knowledge whatsoever is necessary and that you want everyone to feel welcome, even if they don’t have experience of discussing subjects like this. You can suggest that if anyone thinks they might have practical difficulty reading the booklets they can talk to you after the session to think of ways to work around this. Large print copies of the booklet are available from Friends House (email neweconomy@quaker.org.uk).

**Exploratory activities**

1. **Check in**

Ask everyone to go round and feedback briefly on how they found the booklet. You could ask participants to limit their feedback to one or two minutes each.

1. **Questions for discussion**

Read out the questions that are included in the blue boxes in the booklet (see list in appendix) or distribute print outs of the appendix to participants. Ask participants to identify any questions that they would like to discuss.

Group participants could break into pairs or small groups to discuss questions and then feed back to the wider group.

Or you can work through the questions identified as a whole group. In this case, ask that Friends be mindful of the balance of participation (see appendix for tips).

1. **Does our economy support wellbeing?**

***This activity is designed to get Friends to think about what is needed for wellbeing and what the aims of economic policy should be.***

1. **Introduction (2 minutes)**

Tell the group you’re going to reflect what the aims of economic policy should be.

Note: ‘Economic policy’ refers to the actions that governments take in the economic field. Things like setting levels of taxation, government budgets, interest rates as well as many other government interventions such as setting a minimum wage.

Tell Friends that *Principles for a new economy* suggests that the purpose of the economy should be: “the enhancement of all life, human and non-human.”

1. **What is important for wellbeing? (12 minutes)**

This principle raises the question, what enhances our lives? What do we need for our wellbeing?

Ask Friends to turn to the person next to them and discuss what things they think are important for their wellbeing. Tell them you will distribute post-it notes and ask them to write each item they mention on a separate post-it note.

Give about 10 post-it notes to each pair and tell them where you will put the remaining post-it notes if they need more.

Tell the group they have 10 minutes.

The facilitator should join a pair themselves and join in discussion.

1. **Collect together ideas (5 minutes)**

Once the time is up, ask everyone to place their post-it notes on a central table or a clear space on the wall.

Ask people to have a look at the notes which have been collected, and work together to arrange similar post-it notes together into clusters. Tell people they have 5 minutes to do this and it’s also a chance for people to get tea or go to the toilet.

1. **Sort the ideas (3 minutes)**

After 5 minutes, ask the people who have been involved in sorting the post-it notes into clusters to name the different areas.

1. **Group definition of wellbeing (3 minutes)**

Ask someone to read out the different aspects of wellbeing out to the group, and you could jot these down on a flip chart sheet if you have one.

Tell the group that this collective definition of wellbeing can be touchstone when thinking about economic policies.

1. **Wellbeing and our economic system (10 minutes)**

*This activity is designed to help Friends think through whether our current economic system upholds or undermines wellbeing*

Ask Friends to form pairs with someone new.

Ask them to consider, in pairs, the following questions:

* Do you have access to each aspect of wellbeing in your own life?
* Do people have equal access to it, nationally and globally?
* Does the provision of each aspect hurt people or the environment in some way?
* How do you think our current system helps or hinders wellbeing?

They have 10 minutes for discussion.

1. **Feedback (10 minutes)**

Ask Friends to feedback on any reflections to the group for 10 minutes.

1. **The aims of economic policy**

The 1st Principle in the *Principles of a new economy* suggests that the purpose of the economy should be the ‘enhancement of human and non-human life’.

Ask the group:

Do they agree with this?

What measures of economic success (mentioned in the booklet) do they think best captures this?

**Closing activities**

1. **Spectrum line: How confident do you feel discussing economics? (15 minutes)**

Tell the group that the new economy is about creating a vision for an improved economic system. But the ultimate aim of this, is for Quakers to take action to actually build this new economy.

One of the main points of the 1st booklet is that we must learn to speak out more on economic matters. But economics is a daunting subject for many people. Many of us do not feel qualified to have an opinion.

Tell the group that the next activity asks us to think broadly about how we feel about economics as a subject, and what we think would make us feel more confident.

Ask everyone to consider this statement:

“I feel confident in my opinions about economic matters”.

Think how far they agree with this statement, on a scale of 1 to 10. Tell Friends that in a minute you will ask them to go and stand somewhere in the room, depending on where they are in this scale. Ask Friends to image a ‘spectrum’ between two opposing walls within the room. One wall represents 0 out of 10, and the opposite wall represents 10 out of 10. Friends should position themselves somewhere between the two walls depending on how far they agree or disagree with the statement.

*Note: You may have to read the statement out a few times.*

*Note: If there are people in your group with mobility difficulties, you can instead ask Friends to raise or lower their hands to show where they fall on this spectrum (a fully raised, vertical hand signally ’10 out of 10 agreement’, and a hand vertically lowered to the floor representing 0 out of 10.*

Once friends have positioned themselves in the room, ask people to say a few words about why they are standing where they are.

You can ask Friends who are standing in a different position to others why they have chosen to stand where they are.

Once you have had a good discussion about people’s position ask Friends to reposition themselves in the room depending on how far they agree with this statement:

“Everyone should be able to have a say on economic policy.”

Repeat the process above (ask people why they are standing where they are).

Let people know that they can move their position along the ‘spectrum’ if their mind is changed by what someone else says.

**9. Closing (5 – 10 minutes)**

Thank everyone for coming.

Announce who will be facilitating the next session (or arrange someone to facilitate if it hasn’t yet been arranged).

Remind everyone / confirm / arrange the date for the next session.

Remind everyone to take or download a copy of the new economy booklet 2 ‘Good work in the new economy’ and read it before the next session. Copies are available from www.quaker.org.uk/neweconomy. If you need to order paper copies of the booklets, you can do so by emailing neweconomy@quaker.org.uk.

Ask Friends to think about real life case studies related to work or enterprise (the topic of ‘Good work in the new economy’) to share at the next session. This could be an example of a local enterprise which they believe is exemplifying or building the new economy; it could be an example of something Friends have done locally to promote good work or ethical business practice. Friends should try to bring information of this kind to share with the rest of the group to session 3.

Invite group members to join the online discussion space, available at:

www.bit.ly/new-economy-discussion. Emphasise that it is not compulsory! The contact person can send the link to those people who are interested.

*Optional:* go round the circle and ask each participant to say one word to capture how they are feeling at the end of the session.

**Closing reflection**

*Optional:* Closing reading. Read something related to economics and/or social change that inspires you.

Suggestions:

* Rebecca Solnit on the importance of discussing the truth of our system:

*“A doctor initially diagnoses, then treats; an activist or citizen must begin by describing what is wrong before acting. To do that well is to call things by their true names. Merely calling out these names is a beam of light […] After that, you still need to name your vision, your plan, your hope, your dream of something better.*

*Names matter; language matters; truth matters. In this era when the mainstream media serve obfuscation and evasion more than anything else (except distraction), alternative media, social media, demonstrations in the streets, and conversations between friends are the refuges of truth, the places where we can begin to rectify the names. So start talking.”*

* Pamela Haines, from Philadelphia Central Meeting (as featured in booklet 1):

*“Generals, along with politicians, claim to be the experts about what will bring peace and security—and they advise us to leave the matter in their experienced and knowledgeable hands. Boldly, we say “No!” We say that their expertise is based in flawed assumptions, and can never get us to peace. Even though we’ve never known a world without war, we hold fast to our deepest beliefs, and say that killing people is wrong. We are confident, outspoken, tenacious, passionate and engaged.*

*In the same way, economists, along with politicians, claim to be the experts about what will bring prosperity, and advise us to leave the matter in their experienced and knowledgeable hands.*

*Meekly, we have said, “Okay. It all seems really complicated and you sound as if you know what you’re talking about, so we cede that whole territory to you.” We can do better. We can say “No!” We can say that their expertise is based on flawed assumptions that can never get the world to prosperity. Even though we’ve never known an economic system that works for everybody, we hold to our deepest beliefs— that greed is not the source of well-being, and that unbridled growth comes at the expense of the planet’s integrity. We are confident, outspoken, tenacious, passionate, and engaged.”*

**Closing silence / worship.**

## Sheet to accompany activity 5

**Discussion questions from booklet 1:**

1. *Principles for a new economy* suggests that the economy should exist to “enhance human and non-human life”. Do you agree with this?
2. In terms of quality of life, what matters to you?
3. What do you think should be the main objectives of an economic system?
4. What are the symptoms of economic inequality in your community? What impact does this have on community life?
5. What things do you think it is important for our economic success measurements to capture?
6. What does the idea of “measurements and targets infused by love” (from Britain Yearly meeting 2012, minute 17) mean to you?
7. What measures of economic success included in the booklet appeal most to you?
8. Do you have any practical ideas for ways that you could help shift mainstream thought on GDP and economic growth?
9. How do you see the link between the economic issues discussed in the booklet and the Quaker testimonies of equality, sustainability, peace, truth, community and simplicity?