



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

Feedback needed:

Contribute to discernment about the future of our central committee structure

In 2023 Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) started thinking about how we might change our committee structure to make it simpler, more sustainable and more inclusive. Minute 21 of Yearly Meeting 2023 asked BYM trustees to continue this work. In August 2023 BYM trustees set up the Group to Review Central Structures (GRCS), bringing together Friends with wide experience of our current committee structure. GRCS now needs feedback from Friends.

In summary, GRCS is proposing the creation of a single central committee. We hope you can answer the following questions:

- What are your hopes for how a single central committee might turn discernment into action?
- What are your concerns about how a single central committee might operate in the proposed structure?

Please read this document and consider the questions. Responses are welcome from individual Friends, informal groups, and Quaker communities. GRCS will consider all responses and report to BYM trustees in November 2024.

Background

BYM has committees to plan, carry out, and evaluate centrally managed Quaker work.

Two of these are known as central committees:

- Quaker Life Central Committee
- Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) Central Committee

GRCS is **only** looking at the work of these two central committees. It has not considered changes to any other part of the BYM committee structure.

Disadvantages to current committee structure

Over the last year, GRCS has been looking at the centrally managed work to see what oversight and governance it needs. We have come to see that there are disadvantages in having two separate central committees:

- There is no single point for planning centrally managed Quaker work.
- The Quaker Life/QPSW divide can make it hard to move resources between these areas of work – the two committees cannot share or swap resources between themselves.
- It can be hard to take a joined-up approach to issues that don't fit neatly into either worship or witness.
- This can make it hard to turn Yearly Meeting discernment into action (especially where we need co-ordination or work across different areas).
- BYM trustees are the only committee with an overview of all centrally managed work. A committee focused solely on the work would be closer to it and would be able to scrutinise it better.
- If BYM trustees can see there is a single point for planning they can delegate responsibility with confidence, recognising that things will not get lost or duplicated between different committees.

Proposed changes

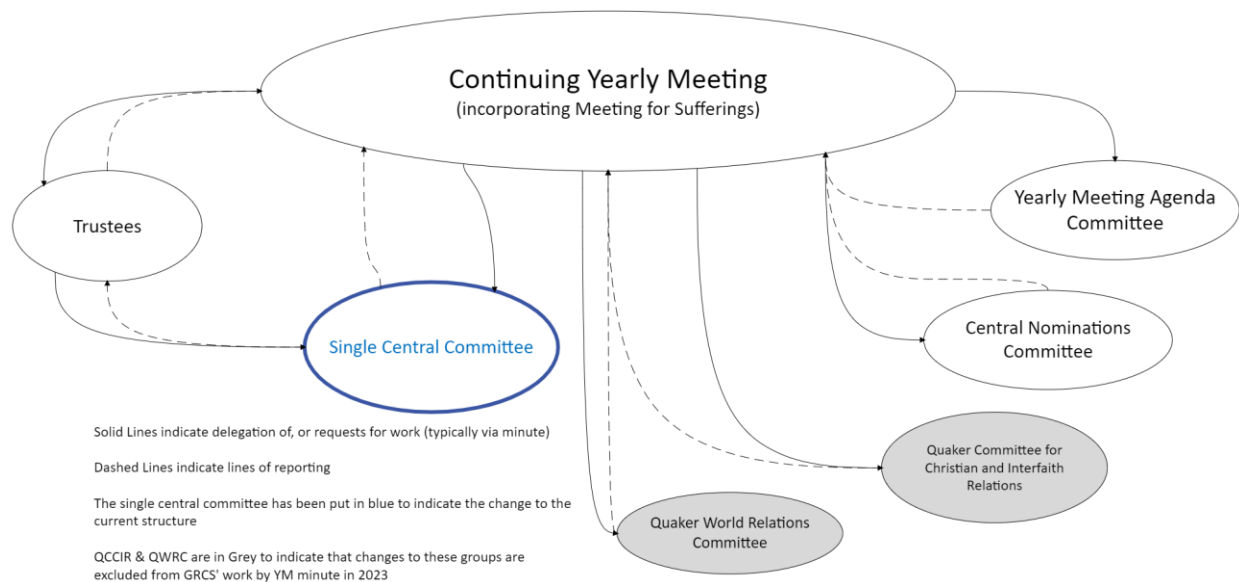
GRCS is therefore proposing a change to **one single central committee**, in place of the current Quaker Life and QPSW central committees. We believe that this change would place spirit-led discernment at the heart of an effective prioritisation process

which looks at Quaker work as a whole. (The work of other national committees will not be significantly affected by this change.)

This single central committee would be the main body responsible for planning centrally managed work. It would express what love requires of us in action, moving us from the discerned leadings of Yearly Meeting to specific work.

The single central committee would ensure that centrally managed work is grounded in Quaker faith, allowing Yearly Meeting to be assured of the spiritual basis for all work. The committee would have oversight of all the work and allocate resources across it. This would include evaluation, monitoring & measurement of impact from the start & throughout.

Yearly Meeting would continue to discern what love requires of us as a faith community. BYM trustees would continue to act on that discernment by preparing the highest-level strategic priorities for centrally managed work. Currently these priorities are: thriving Quaker communities; a sustainable and peaceful world; simple structures and practices. BYM trustees would also continue to set the overall budget for BYM. The single central committee would then take the high-level priorities and decide on work priorities, allocating the budget accordingly. The single central committee would be able to communicate directly with Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting would be able to ask the committee to do work on its behalf. The committee would be accountable to BYM trustees and through them to the Yearly Meeting.



Some tasks currently undertaken by our two central committees do not fit well with a focus on planning and would not transfer to the single central committee. They would need to sit elsewhere in the structure. Examples include directly working to help clarify the Quaker position on issues or acting as a ‘think tank’. We know we cannot give one committee all the work of our two current committees and believe there are other ways to undertake some short-term or more occasional pieces of work.

Other significant issues

Having a single central committee will not, on its own, address all the significant issues we currently face. Things to think further about include:

- Whether we can enable Friends to give Quaker service in ways that are right for them, e.g. not just by committing to a 3-year (minimum) period of service with lots of reading and meetings. Currently we are heavily reliant on a small pool of people, which is not sustainable.
- Whether we can offer Friends other ways to participate in our structures e.g. a form of participation that does Quaker work, rather than governing it.
- Whether we can better connect our formal governance structure with the many vibrant Quaker networks that exist in other parts of BYM (including Quaker Recognised Bodies).

- As above, how we might do some of the work currently given to the two central committees differently, so that a single central committee is not overburdened.

We think that these issues are linked. For example, if we can suggest new ways of doing some of the non-planning work of the current central committees this may uncover different ways for Friends to participate. If Friends discern that we should move to a single central committee then further work will be needed to address these points.

The proposal to move to a single central committee would only involve laying down Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness central committees. It would not result in changes to other standing committees.

What are we asking you to do now?

Friends are invited to participate in the discernment on this proposal by answering the questions:

- What are your hopes for how a single central committee might turn discernment into action?
- What are your concerns about how a single central committee might operate in the proposed structure?
- Are there any other comments you wish to share with GRCS to contribute to their discernment on this change?

Please share this widely and send all contributions to governance@quaker.org.uk by no later than 13.10.2024.