



Preparing for Yearly Meeting Appendix

Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings
and Meeting for Sufferings

This document contains the following reports and minutes:

Meeting for Sufferings minute from March 2024, Minute MfS/24/03/13

GRYYM final report on the review of Meeting for Sufferings

(to MfS March 2024): paper **MfS 2024 03 15**, full papers at:

www.quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2024-03-calling-letter-agenda-papers

pages 50-58 (Stage Two report)

Overview of the work of GRYYM since the group was appointed

(shared with MfS March 2024): paper **MfS 2024 03 13**, full papers at:

www.quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2024-03-calling-letter-agenda-papers

pages 39-41 (Brief History of GRYYM)

Full papers and minutes for all Meetings for Sufferings can be found at:

www.quaker.org.uk/mfs



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

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings

Held at Friends House and by video conference on 2 December 2023

MfS/24/03/13 Review of Meeting for Sufferings

The Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM) has brought a final report on the future of Meeting for Sufferings. We note that minutes on this matter received earlier in this meeting have also been before us.

GRYYM's report recommends we move to 'a continuing Yearly Meeting' and sets out what this means, how it might address some of the concerns we have with our present arrangements and how a continuing Yearly Meeting could work. We have been reminded that at the heart of this proposal is our belief that it will strengthen spirit-led discernment within our Religious Society. By bringing both Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings together in a single continuing Yearly Meeting we can reduce duplication and increase accountability and participation. In particular it clarifies the role of trustees in the yearly meeting.

We welcome the proposals, although some reservations have been expressed. In particular, some Friends have expressed concern that accepting the proposals would mean there is less time for Friends in general to discern together, which deepens the worship and life of the community. We note that the proposals include the recommendation that we retain the practice of appointed area meeting representatives attending the meeting.

We have heard that other yearly meetings have already adopted the practice of a continuing yearly meeting. We have also heard enthusiasm on the part of children, youth and families staff for more frequent opportunities for national gatherings and recognition that a more flexible structure could assist with maintaining the participation of young people if anticipated changes to the school year in England and Wales are realised.

We note that some of the recommendations do not need to wait for structural changes to take effect.

We agree to endorse these proposals and send the report to Yearly Meeting for its discernment in July. We note that, if adopted, this would mean the laying down of the venerable institution of Meeting for Sufferings, which is a sadness for many, and we have heard testimony on the privilege that service on this body has meant to many Friends.

We thank the Friends involved in this process for their care in bringing this report and uphold them in bringing it to Yearly Meeting.

We have been reminded that sometimes we need to experience something before we can appreciate it, and that it will take some years to implement these changes. We recommend that we should hold a review of any changes after a fixed period. Let us live adventurously!

Robert Card, Clerk

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Siobhán Haire". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Siobhán Haire
Deputy Recording Clerk

To: GRYM
Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee

Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)

Stage Two Final Report

A Continuing Yearly Meeting

In receiving our report last October, Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) minuted “*We agree that this [i.e. a continuing Yearly Meeting] is the right way forward*” and that GRYYM should “*bring a detailed proposal to us for Yearly Meeting in session in 2024*”.

GRYYM’s proposal is that we move to a continuing Yearly Meeting (YM) i.e. that the whole yearly meeting, including representatives from each Area Meeting, meets four times each year. At the heart of this proposal is our belief that it will strengthen spirit-led discernment within our Religious Society.

Our current structures are far from perfect and in some ways they hold us back. There are too many interfaces and insufficient clarity about accountability, while at the same time communication is poor. Our corporate discernment both at MfS and YM is often deep and grounded but we may not be able to see tangible actions or changes following our decisions because they are separated from decisions about the allocation of resources. Discernment at MfS often needs to be repeated at YM and the annual nature of YM can make it difficult to follow through on decisions and minutes that are made. We need to make changes to improve these issues. By bringing both bodies together in a single continuing YM we can reduce duplication and increase accountability and participation.

Centrality of discernment

Through all stages of our work, GRYYM has been reminded of the centrality of spirit-led discernment to all our functions as a Religious Society. Friends have told us how much they value the experience of corporate discernment at YM. In a continuing YM we would have more opportunities for all Friends to come together and recognise where the spirit is leading us.

We know that the spirit may speak with the voice of anyone in the meeting and that is why we value openness, participation and diversity. Any one of us may be given words but we do not expect any single one of us to have them all. Practising discernment on the most important issues in open sessions means the spirit can communicate with us through different voices, perhaps making it easier for us to hear the meaning behind the words.

Learning and practising

Friends have told GRYYM that YM is a place where they learn what Quaker discernment is and how to do it. More frequent YM sessions will help Friends to learn and practise.

Structure that empowers and enables

The world is always changing, and so is our Religious Society. New Friends join us and bring their own insights into how power and responsibility should be shared. None of our structure is as it was in the early days and this is as it should be. Sections 6.01 and 7.01 of *Quaker faith and practice* show us how much has changed in 350 years. We need to be open to the spirit to create and recreate simple, understandable structures that empower and enable us to do the work that the spirit leads us to do.

Key issues GRYYM has considered

(a) Accountability

A recurring concern for some Friends is the extent to which BYM Trustees are accountable and to whom.

BYM Trustees are accountable to Yearly Meeting and this is unchanged in our proposal. Trustees have never been accountable to MfS (and legally they cannot be made accountable to MfS). Reports given by BYM Trustees to MfS are for information only. Lines of accountability in our current arrangements are not clear to all Friends and we need them to be simpler. Regular reporting by BYM Trustees to a continuing Yearly Meeting (in addition to the annual report session that already takes place) will allow for more frequent and meaningful dialogue with Trustees.

(b) Representation

GRYYM recommends that representatives should be appointed to attend a continuing YM. The change proposed is not to do away with representatives, but to open up discernment and decision making to all Friends.

Some Friends are specifically concerned by the prospect of MfS no longer existing as BYM's standing representative body. If we are to judge the impact of this, we should ask what we mean by 'representation'. It seems so simple to have one Friend from each Area Meeting attending and making decisions together. Does that actually give us a representative body? Amongst other things, MfS has "*a part to play in developing a visionary and prophetic role for the whole Yearly Meeting and in fostering communication throughout the whole Yearly Meeting*" (*Quaker faith & practice* 7,02). Is MfS well equipped to do those things? Our questioning, listening and discernment has led GRYYM to the conclusion that the answer is no.

There was never a suggestion that MfS representatives were delegates from their Area Meeting. Quaker discernment doesn't work like that. The intention is that by bringing together Friends from all our Quaker communities, there is a breadth of experience that enables Sufferings to hear the uncomfortable truths sometimes needed to lead us to prophesy. Geographical diversity doesn't necessarily lead to a diversity of experience and we can have a group of fairly similar Friends: predominantly retired, professional, middle class and white. Our current system hampers our ability to hear the spirit speaking through the kinds of Friends not appointed as MfS representatives.

Some of the concern we have heard is about weakening the role of Area Meetings in our central decision making. As a standing representative body, MfS is not meant to represent Area Meetings but is meant to represent Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting. The use of Area Meetings as appointing bodies is a mechanism for that.

The proposal is that Area Meetings will continue to be able to send minutes to YM. YM Agenda Committee will develop ways to test those minutes to determine if they should be taken to a YM session for discernment or if they should be dealt with in some other way (e.g. whether they need to be sent somewhere for further threshing).

In any case, as above, GRYYM is clear that a continuing YM will need representatives from Area Meetings and representation should therefore continue.

One key role of appointed representatives is to bring continuity to the meeting. In the case of MfS, we have heard that this has not always worked as intended. Different Area Meetings manage the workload of the representative and alternate differently, and at any meeting of MfS there are a number of Friends present who are not fully aware of the history of particular items of business and who find it hard to contribute to the discernment.

Area Meetings need to use systems that work for them and their members, but if there is to be a continuing YM with Area Meeting representatives attending then we think these representatives should be appointed on the basis that they can attend the majority of meetings during their term of service.

(c) Communication across Britain Yearly Meeting

A key role for MfS currently is to foster communication throughout the Yearly Meeting. In GRYYM's report to MfS in December 2022 we identified that this role is not done well, even though the Friends involved make a lot of effort (see <https://quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2022-12-agenda--papers-package> p22).

The communication that Friends want from MfS is not really about the passing on of information. There are many ways of communicating information that are more effective than sending a Friend from each Area Meeting to receive information at MfS, bring it back to and pass it on via those Friends who attend Area Meeting. The communication envisaged as coming through MfS is more than this. It is about trying

to bring us into a spiritual unity, a shared understanding of our community being led. The hope is of joining our disparate worshipping communities together into one, collectively offering our lives as vehicles of transformation.

MfS is not generally succeeding in this kind of communication either. We have heard that Friends feel that YM does this much better. GRYYM feels that a continuing YM would improve communication of this kind as it would give all Friends the chance to join shared worship and discernment more frequently, as well as offering informal opportunities to meet and share with Friends from other areas.

(d) Agenda time

There will be less agenda time overall if we move to four continuing YM sessions instead of four sessions of MfS plus one of YM. That need not translate into significantly less time for deep discernment. There will be less need for explaining what happened in one body and how it impacts on the other, and we can use more creative methods for preparation and for dealing with routine business in order to free up time. It will be for Agenda Committee to plan the sessions to allow time for consideration of important business. The starting point for the three shorter sessions is that they will last for a Saturday, but Agenda Committee could plan for slightly longer (e.g. by starting on Friday evening or extending into Sunday morning) if experience showed this was necessary.

(e) Financial support

We have also heard concerns about a lack of financial support, particularly for Area Meetings. We have not made any recommendations about how representatives to YM should be paid for. We agree that financial support must be considered carefully because it is essential that individual Friends and Area Meetings are not financially excluded from a continuing YM. BYM may need to contribute more than it does now to support attendance at YM. Likewise, not all individuals and Area Meetings are lacking in funds, and a pooling of resources could be possible. Our current arrangements for paying for MfS representatives are relatively recent (Area Meetings were once responsible for these expenses). We have also heard that the current financial support for attending YM is confusing to access. There are therefore positive opportunities for change and an appropriate group should be asked to look into this. GRYYM recommends that MfS asks BYM Trustees to take this forward.

(f) Change

GRYYM has heard from Friends who do not want changes to be made to the way things are. But change is all around us and it is affecting Quakers just as it affects everyone else. Societal changes mean that many Friends have less free time than was common in the recent past. The majority of Friends today are convinced, rather than having grown up within the Society, but our provision of learning about Quaker ways may not have caught up with that change.

Our tabular statement and reports from Meetings show us how our Religious Society is already in a state of change. Attendance at Quaker meetings for worship is falling. Attendance at meetings for worship for business is also falling. These trends, together with difficulties in appointing Friends to important service, are already weakening our ability to discern well at local level.

We can choose an option where we don't change our structures, but we cannot choose an option of no change. Throughout BYM Friends are looking prayerfully at how to simplify structures and make them work for their current needs. GRYYM has been asked to do this work on a yearly meeting scale. We have heard from Friends who want to see a structure that is simple, promotes diversity and participation, and responds more quickly to external events. We hope our proposal offers this and that it will 'release the energy in our corporate structures'.

We cannot know for sure if structural change will help. We can only trust our leadings. GRYYM has heard a call to live adventurously. We believe that a continuing YM would bring the following positive changes:

1. Spirit-led discernment: complex issues requiring discernment at national level can be well understood with Friends able to engage with them more than once. For example, an item could be threshed at one session, then considered again at another session a few months later.
2. Building community: all Friends will have the opportunity to come together four times a year. We expect that there will be a children, youth & families programme at all four YM sessions.
3. Diversity: all Friends will be able to be a part of the discernment for important issues affecting Quakers in Britain. There will be more chances for Friends with different perspectives to contribute to decision making.
4. Learning: there will be more opportunities for Friends to experience YM-wide discernment, which is an important part of our learning as Quakers.

How would a continuing Yearly Meeting work?

The following is not a full list of everything that could happen but it is intended to give Friends a better idea of what GRYYM are suggesting.

1. Yearly Meeting in session would remain the final constitutional authority for Quakers in Britain. YM would retain all the powers that it currently has. As continuing YM it would hold sessions more than once per year.
2. YM would be responsible for setting the direction of the centrally managed work and ensuring that this work reflects the concerns of Quakers in Britain.
3. MfS would no longer meet as a separate body. Where MfS currently acts on behalf of YM between sessions, YM itself will take on this work. Examples include: hearing from BYM Trustees; receiving the annual report and accounts; giving guidance to BYM Trustees on important policy matters. Some of the work currently done by MfS would be done by other

committees including YM Agenda Committee and the central and standing committees (or any successor committees). Some work might be split, for example YM in session could make the entries in the Court & Prison Register while another suitable committee could uphold the Friends involved.

4. BYM Trustees would remain accountable and responsive to YM.
5. Continuing YM sessions would be open to all, just as Yearly Meeting is now.
6. Continuing YM would normally hold four sessions per year. In general, one session per year would be held over several days (as over the May Bank Holidays currently). The precise length of each session would be decided by YM Agenda Committee as part of its role in planning the agenda.
7. The option to hold a longer, residential-style session would still exist – this would generally happen no more than once every three years.
8. Continuing YM sessions would be blended.
9. Some continuing YM sessions would be held at different locations across the yearly meeting (not just Friends House).
10. There would be a single clerking team for all sessions of the continuing YM.
11. There would be a single YM Agenda Committee for all sessions of the continuing YM.
12. The new YM Agenda Committee would not be clerked by a member of the YM clerking team, although YM clerks would attend it.
13. The new YM Agenda Committee would focus on agenda planning. Another linked group, including staff, would focus on the practicalities for the events.
14. YM Agenda Committee would help Friends to prepare for YM sessions, by providing appropriate materials for individuals and meetings and/or by holding specific online preparation meetings before the sessions.
15. Area Meetings would be expected to send Friends as representatives to continuing YM, as would all those committees and meetings of Friends who currently send representatives to MfS. Other groups could be encouraged to send Friends. The 'sending' group would appoint these Friends, rather than YM having to do so. The length of representatives' terms should be sufficient to allow them to gain experience and confidence, although additional representative(s) could be appointed with shorter terms. Staggering terms of service to avoid a single large changeover would be helpful.
16. The appointment of AM and other meeting representatives would ensure adequate continuity from one session to the next; sending groups should aim to appoint Friends who expect to attend almost all continuing YM sessions.
17. Lack of financial resources should not stop Friends from attending continuing YM sessions. Likewise, they should not mean Area Meetings cannot send representatives. An appropriate mechanism of financial support for Friends and Area Meetings would therefore need to be created.

18. If YM 2024 agrees to these proposals then we recommend that new arrangements would begin with the rise of YM in May 2026. A full timetable for implementation would be brought to YM 2025.

Impact on other committees

(a) YM Agenda Committee

Much of the current business of MfS would transfer to the new continuing YM. The new YM Agenda Committee would discern which of that business would be done by YM in session. In this way the new YM Agenda Committee would also take over responsibility for the work currently done by the MfS Arrangements Group.

With a continuing YM, Area Meeting minutes that are currently addressed to MfS would be addressed to YM. YM Agenda Committee would develop ways to test those minutes to determine if they should be taken to a YM session for discernment or dealt with in some other way (e.g. by being sent to a committee that is already working on a similar issue for comment first). This way of working would be similar to how MfS Arrangements Group helps to prepare AM minutes to come to MfS in the current system.

(b) Group to Review Central Structures

The Group to Review Central Structures (GRCS) was set up by BYM Trustees in response to YM 2023 minute 21. GRCS is looking primarily at central committees. Some of the business currently done by MfS might be suitable to be handed over to the central committees, but these committees may look very different in the future. GRCS is aware of GRYYM's proposals and if they are agreed then GRCS will incorporate them into its own proposals for change.

(c) BYM Trustees

Some Friends are concerned that the move to a continuing YM will increase the power of BYM Trustees. BYM Trustees will still be accountable and responsive to YM, which would now meet four times a year, giving more opportunity for scrutiny and direction. None of the current functions of MfS will be given to BYM Trustees so the scope of their role would not increase.

Risks and mitigation

All actions involve an element of risk. The proposed changes are aimed at the risks that are currently present. However, we must think carefully about the likely risks of change and put in place measures to mitigate those risks.

Since spirit-led discernment is of paramount importance, we want to maintain and strengthen our discernment. We need to pay particular attention to anything that risks having a negative impact on the quality of discernment. The following issues, some of which are already present in our current structure, need consideration:

Risk	Likely underlying issues	Possible mitigations
<p>Reduced attendance, particularly at shorter sessions (limited input from wider body of Friends; risk of reducing 'buy in' to decisions taken at YM)</p>	<p>Friends lack time. Friends have too many other commitments. Friends who are the single Quaker in their family feel they can't commit the additional time. Friends don't see the point. Cost is a barrier. More frequent YM sessions make YM feel less 'special' so Friends don't prioritise attending.</p>	<p>Representatives appointed from AMs & other meetings. Clear communication of the importance of YM. Agendas that Friends want to engage with & that meet their needs. Annual timetable set out well in advance so Friends can plan. Appropriate financial support is planned. YM is accessible to all (e.g. Friends of all ages, Friends with disabilities, Friends with caring responsibilities).</p>
<p>Lack of continuity in attendance (things have to be repeated; decision making is inconsistent; Friends are frustrated)</p>	<p>Friends pick one or two sessions a year that are personally of interest or convenient</p>	<p>As above – representatives in particular will provide continuity. The impact of lack of continuity can be minimised by communications in advance and during a YM covering the background and previous discernment on a topic. YM will uphold Quaker discipline of trusting prior discernment. Discernment will not be re-opened just because different Friends are present.</p>
<p>Lobbying i.e. orchestrated attempts to sway the meeting, not based on discernment (reduced confidence in decisions; increased secularisation)</p>	<p>Friends with shared interests work together to achieve outcomes based on views formed in advance</p>	<p>Clear teaching of Quaker discipline so Friends understand the difference between preparing themselves and closing their hearts & minds to change. Clear ways for Friends to raise concerns about the discipline in the meeting.</p>

		All Friends understand and are willing to play their part in securing good discipline at YM. Good eldering & clerking.
Friends are poorly prepared (decisions not based on best available information; reduced quality of discernment)	Friends lack time to read documents in advance. Friends don't see the need to prepare for YM.	Clear teaching on the importance of preparation. Easy to access documents in advance, including in a variety of formats. Meetings support Friends to prepare. Zoom preparation meetings in advance of sessions.

Future reviews

Review should be built into any new arrangements. Friends should continue to be given regular opportunities to feedback on all aspects of YM. YM should ensure it has an appropriate mechanism in place for reviewing the new continuing YM system.

We have heard calls for BYM Trustees to be reviewed. They were last reviewed in 2021, having previously been reviewed in 2016 and 2011. YM may wish to look again at their remit and role once they have reported on their review of the central structures (expected to be in 2025).

Next steps needed

GRYYM suggests that MfS endorses the proposal for a continuing YM, making any comments that it considers helpful, and sends the proposal to YM 2024 for further discernment. If YM 2024 agrees with the principles then it can set a process and timetable for implementation.

Ann Kerr & Carolyn Sansom

Co-Conveners of GRYYM

On behalf of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings

A brief history of the work of GRYYM (The Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings)

Initial phase of work: YM & YMG

In May 2019 Yearly Meeting (YM) asked for a review of YM and YM Gatherings (YMG). In December 2019 Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) agreed to set up a review group to do this work. The group had two stages of work to complete:

1. A review of how well YM & YMG are meeting their purposes and whether the purposes need to be changed or updated;
2. A review of the planning & implementation of YM & YMG (to be seen in the light of findings of stage one).

In October 2020 MfS appointed Friends to serve on a review group “until the work is completed”. Although no definite timescale was set for completion, the expectation was that a report would go to YM 2023. At that time the group was generally referred to by the abbreviation YMRG, standing for Yearly Meeting Review Group. When the group’s terms of reference were later amended it came to be known as the **Group to Review YM, YMG & MfS (GRYYM)**.

The group began its work on stage one in 2021. It used a questionnaire, in depth interviews, and a special interest group around the time of YM 2021 to gather the views of Friends. It spent time together in worship and discernment. The group presented its report on the functions of YM and YMG to MfS in March 2022. The full report is available here: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2022-03-agenda-papers-package> (pp33-41).

Addition of MfS to the work

While the group was still working on stage one, YM 2021 asked MfS to consider whether MfS should be reviewed. YM Minute 28 reads in part:

The different parts of our governance are inextricably intertwined and we know the importance of their working well together. We have opportunities to examine this when they report to us at Yearly Meeting. We acknowledge that there are unresolved tensions that impact on the role of Meeting for Sufferings and that their role may now need review. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to consider this and return to us.

MfS considered this minute in March 2022 and agreed to ask the existing review group to expand its work to include a review of MfS. From then on, the group had a total of three stages of work:

1. As above on the purposes of YM & YMG, which was completed with the March 2022 report;
2. NEW: A review of the current role of MfS within the structures of Britain Yearly Meeting;
3. As above but expanded to include MfS – a review of the planning & implementation of YM, YMG & MfS (to be seen in the light of findings of stage one & two).

The group addressed stage two via an open consultation, a special interest group around the time of YM 2022, online workshops, and many more conversations with Friends. The group thought widely about the questions it had been asked and again spent time in worship and discernment together. The group presented its first report on stage two to MfS in December 2022. It can be read here:

<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2022-12-agenda--papers-package> (pp22-29).

In this report the group identified that in the structure we have now, lines of accountability are unclear and there is considerable duplication and overlap. The report explored some possibilities for change, noting that changing the position of MfS in the structure to place it either below trustees (i.e. to become a consultative body) or above trustees (i.e. by merging it with YM) would bring greater clarity. However, the report did not make a specific recommendation. MfS sent this report to YM 2023. YM minute 30 reads in part:

We recognise that a change in the relationship between Yearly Meeting, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, and Meeting for Sufferings is needed to address the overlap in current roles and responsibilities. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to bring to a future Yearly Meeting session proposals for what that change could look like. We are seeking changes that could release energy within our corporate structures, emphasise the importance of spirit-led discernment, allow wider and more diverse participation in decision making and improve communication between individual Friends, local meetings, area meetings and Meeting for Sufferings.

Final phase of work

Following YM 2023's request for proposals for change, the review group has continued its process of discernment, working on specific recommendations. It also worked on stage three.

GRYYM gave an update to MfS in October 2023. The relevant MfS minute reads:

MfS/23/10/10 Review of Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings

We receive a report from the Group appointed to review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings.

It proposes that Meeting for Sufferings becomes a part of a continuing Yearly Meeting.

We agree that this is the right way forward and ask the group to work up this option, planning to bring a detailed proposal to us for Yearly Meeting in session in 2024.

In response to this minute, GRYYM presented a short written report to MfS in December 2023 outlining how a continuing YM might work:
<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2023-12-agenda--papers-package> (pp24-27).
MfS in session provided valuable feedback, including concerns about the proposals.

A final report on stage two, together with a report on stage three, are now in the papers for this March 2024 meeting of MfS.