



1 Introduction

Speaking out in the world is an essential part of our religious and social witness. Friends are therefore encouraged to express their faith and values whenever suitable opportunities arise, and to use the media confidently for public comment on our concerns. Quaker witness to the world is guided by the Spirit and also governed by our religious discipline. Public expression of corporate Quaker views must spring from discerned positions reached by an appropriate Quaker body.

This document therefore provides guidance for all Friends and meetings. It contains definitions and principles, and also Britain Yearly Meeting's (BYM's) policy on authorising public expression of Quaker views. The policy is binding on Friends and staff who serve the central committee structure of the Yearly Meeting. Its principles are also intended to guide individual Friends, Meetings and Quaker groups when they make public statements identified as "Quaker".

Three main types of expression of Quaker views are covered by the policy. **Yearly Meeting Statements** establish in an agreed form of words where Friends stand on an issue of concern and are primarily addressed to Friends in the Yearly Meeting. **Public statements and comments** are addressed primarily to the wider world, though they also have an important role in keeping Friends informed. **Joint statements** are ones which we sign along with other bodies, and have often had a share in drafting. Each of these types of expression is dealt with in turn below, in sections which start with the fundamental principles and then describe the required authorisation. Some other types of public message are dealt with briefly in section 6.

All meetings, listed informal groups and other Quaker bodies, when they express views which might be seen as representing the "Quaker position" on an issue, should make it clear on whose behalf they are speaking, and they are encouraged to consult the appropriate BYM staff member when the topic may be contentious.

When individual Friends are identified as Quakers, they should consider whether what they say might be taken as representing Friends as a body. They should make it clear when it does not.

This policy document covers all forms of media, for example, leaflets, posters, letters to the press, broadcast interviews, social media or web-pages. Some channels will, however, be more suited to particular kinds of message and decisions have to be made at very different speeds for different channels. The message itself needs to be clearly defined before the appropriate media are selected. For BYM staff and committees, each channel will have a sign-off procedure at staff level.

2 Yearly Meeting Statements

Yearly Meeting Statements establish and explain the witness of Friends on an issue of concern. They arise from a process of discernment by Yearly Meeting in session or by Meeting for Sufferings and are primarily addressed to Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting.

Such witness arises from the leadings of the Holy Spirit, and is tested in the gathered meeting. It is an expression of love and truth. To be convincing, it must arise from our engagement with the issue addressed as well as from our testimonies.

When rightly discerned, we believe our Yearly Meeting Statements will convey a spiritual quality which reflects their origin. It follows that these statements should not be strident, nor recriminatory, nor judgemental, nor self-righteous, nor clichéd, nor ill-informed. Neither should they be narrowly prescriptive.

Our Yearly Meeting Statements are addressed first and foremost to Friends, to state the Yearly Meeting's discerned position, to explain how we came to it and to encourage all Friends to unite with it. When we speak out to the world, our voice is not always heard, but nevertheless our Yearly Meeting Statements should galvanise us to put our convictions into action.

Yearly Meeting Statements which speak on behalf of Quakers in Britain must be agreed as specific texts by Yearly Meeting (YM) in session or by Meeting for Sufferings (MfS). When new Quaker positions are being developed, there is normally a period of wide consideration before a statement is written. Yearly Meeting or Meeting for Sufferings may, if content with the general content and tone of a draft statement, delegate minor editorial changes to others, with its clerk approving the final text.

The agreed text should be quoted in the minute which agrees the statement, or in a minute of the following meeting if amendments are delegated to others. If Yearly Meeting delegates authority for amendments, it may ask that the final statement be confirmed by Meeting for Sufferings and quoted in its minutes. A minute of Yearly Meeting or Meeting for Sufferings may itself sometimes act as a Yearly Meeting Statement (eg minute 28 of YMG in 2009, on same sex marriage, and minute S/11/04/4 of Meeting for Sufferings in April 2011 on boycotting settlement products). It is helpful if the clerk makes the meeting aware of the intended public nature of such a minute before it is agreed.

It is important that all corporate statements made by groups other than MfS or YM contain, within their title or text, the name of the body making the statement and that it is never implied that they are statements of Quakers in general or of Quakers in Britain unless they are agreed or formally endorsed by YM or MfS.

3 Public statements and comments

Public statements and comments are made by staff and committees of Britain Yearly Meeting to explain Quaker witness in more specific terms. They are also made by Quaker meetings at local level, by special interest groups and by individual Friends. They are primarily addressed to the wider world, though they also play an important role in keeping Friends informed.

The general principles which guide our Yearly Meeting Statements are also relevant to public statements and comments. Such comments should be grounded in discernment and should convey a spiritual quality which reflects their Quaker origin. They contribute our religious witness to the evolving discourse around current events and broader issues of world affairs, using language which will be widely understood by non-Quakers.

Public statements and comments should follow the basic principles indicated in Quaker faith & practice. Friends must be careful to explain the provenance of their statements, and must not claim to speak on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting without explicit authority. Nevertheless, the message should derive from agreed policy of Quakers in Britain (normally evidenced by minutes, agreed Yearly Meeting statements and/or Quaker faith and practice). There should be sufficient current or

recent concern among the body of Friends it is speaking for to justify speaking out on this subject. The way it is expressed should conform with Quaker values. No area of Quaker work should be jeopardised by the message, or if this is a possibility, those considering making the statement should ensure that the statement can be justified. Meetings, groups and individuals are encouraged to seek advice from relevant Friends and to consult the BYM Advocacy and Public Relationships Team.

For public statements and comments made on behalf of Quakers in Britain, all relevant staff (including the media officer and any staff who work in the field concerned) must be consulted in a timely way. For any message on a fresh aspect of policy, or which goes beyond what has recently been said publicly, or which is expressed in an unusual or more controversial way, the General Secretary of the department(s) within whose remit the subject falls and the Recording Clerk must authorise the message before it is issued. These staff will, where appropriate, consult relevant clerks. The Clerk of BYM Trustees will be consulted whenever there is a possibility of reputational risk. Clerks have the authority to approve or to reject the proposal, and in difficult cases to consult their committee. All those involved should be kept informed about messages issued. The detailed procedures for these processes are set out in a separate document. Messages which restate in a new form or through a different medium what has previously and recently been agreed by the above processes do not need separate approval by clerks.

In the most urgent cases, when time is of the essence, the Recording Clerk may make a public statement or comment on behalf of Quakers in Britain, following the principles outlined in this paper and consulting relevant clerks and staff to the degree possible in the time available.

Quaker Meetings and groups should set up procedures for taking decisions about making public statements and comments. These will normally involve a process of timely consultation among a specified group, including the clerk of the body concerned. When speaking publicly Friends are encouraged to draw on statements and comments made on behalf of Quakers in Britain.

This guidance is not intended to hamper urgent action undertaken responsibly by relevant post-holders, locally or at BYM level, to correct misleading reports in the media or other misunderstandings in the public domain.

4 Joining campaigning coalitions and signing joint statements

Joint statements are those which Britain Yearly Meeting (or another Quaker body) supports alongside other bodies. Quakers often have a share in the drafting of such statements, which are addressed to the wider world and/or to agencies responsible for delivering relevant policy.

Joint statements make a necessary contribution to Quaker action. Statements on behalf of Quakers in Britain are subject to careful scrutiny by BYM staff, using a checklist authorised by Britain Yearly Meeting. Joint statements will only be endorsed when we are willing to support all their messages and to share a platform with all co-signatories, when language and tone are acceptable to Friends, and when we are confident that such statements will not harm other Quaker work which may be going on quietly. Joint statements are reported to the relevant BYM committees, to which they may also be referred for a further process of discernment.

The decision to join with other organisations in public expression of a shared policy position, or to plan and carry out a sustained public campaign together, requires the authority of the Quaker body concerned. In the case of BYM, the decision requires the approval of the committee charged with oversight of the work area and the approval of the relevant General Secretary and the Recording Clerk. These staff will, where appropriate, consult relevant clerks. The Clerk of BYM Trustees will be consulted whenever there is a possibility of reputational risk.

In addition to the criteria outlined above, the following questions should receive a satisfactory answer:

1. What resources are we committing, including staff time?
2. Are we willing to have the Quaker name allied in public with these organisations/signatories?
3. Are we confident that the facts others have researched are accurate?
4. Would it be preferable to speak separately, in our own words?

Careful judgment will be needed on how far we are willing to compromise on process, language and content in order to work in alliance with others.

5 Who should sign?

When a local or area meeting or other Quaker body issues a public statement or comment, or signs a joint statement, the clerk will normally sign, unless some other arrangement has been agreed.

At BYM level, decisions will often be needed on whether 'Quakers in Britain' or 'Quaker Peace and Social Witness' is issuing the public statement or comment or signing the joint statement. The default position is 'Quakers in Britain', in which case, if a signature is required, it should be that of the Recording Clerk, the Clerk of Meeting for Sufferings or (on occasion) the Clerk of Yearly Meeting or the Clerk of BYM Trustees. The nature of the statement or comment and/or who is signing from other organisations are the key factors. Statements or comments from central or standing committees should normally be signed by the General Secretary or the Clerk of the relevant committee.

The person who signs should be involved in the decision-making process and should always agree to their name being used.

6 Other types of expression

a) Private messages

Some areas of advocacy involve messages which are not primarily intended to be actively publicised, such as submissions to government consultations. Specialist BYM committees may agree and send submissions on subjects within their remit. They will however be guided by many of the criteria listed above.

Private letters (as opposed to those clearly marked as 'open') to politicians or other people with power or influence should not be publicised by the sender, though they may in practice be published or quoted by their recipients. Much of the guidance in this document will be relevant in deciding whether to write and what to say.

b) Street demonstrations

Friends and BYM staff who participate in marches, vigils etc, as individuals, should be aware that they may be identified as Quaker spokespeople. They should be careful about associating themselves publicly with causes from which many Friends would wish to distance themselves. A recognisable Quaker group within a larger demonstration should only be organised (by, for instance, arranging for Friends to meet up beforehand or providing Quaker banners) if the campaign objective is one for which Friends have formally expressed support, the organiser is a body or coalition with which we are willing to be associated, and the event is expected to be peaceful.

c) Nonviolent direct action

Generally, the same guidance applies as for street demonstrations.

If there is an intention to break the law for conscience's sake, participation by any individual Friend should be rigorously tested with their worshipping group. BYM staff must clear their intentions with their line manager, even when the action will be outside working hours.

If a Quaker group provides training or support for any action during which it is intended to break the law, this should be fully and carefully tested by the responsible group(s), including their trustees.

Reasons for breaking the law or supporting those who do so should be strong and always be publicly stated.

Drafted by Meeting for Sufferings Speaking Out Group

Agreed by Meeting for Sufferings held 1 February 2014, in minute S/14/02/05

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