

DISCUSSIONS IN THE HUBS ON 'STRENGTHENING OUR CORE PURPOSES'

Preamble

In 2014-15 we conducted an overhaul of the organisational structure of our local meeting, and attempted to rethink our various activities in terms of how they might fulfill our main purposes as a Quaker meeting. We identified these purposes as *worship, fellowship, and witness*. In the same exercise, we re-examined all our activities, and distributed them across four 'Hubs', called *Faith Community, Learning & Action, Resources, and Administration*. After a year's operation under the new structure, we set up a review group to inspect how well it was working and make recommendations. The group reported in August last year, and one of its recommendations (the second) was:

Ask each hub to work out how it can best strengthen the Meeting's core purposes of worship, fellowship and witness, and to share their vision and plans each year with Meeting for Business.

The remainder of the present document contains excerpts from the discussions of this recommendation in the several hubs. It will be available on the website as an appendix to an associated document that presents a summary of our purposes and of how our various activities are divided across our four Hubs, followed by suggestions on what the Hubs can do to keep the purposes at the forefront of their work.

Faith Community Hub – Fulfilling our Purposes (22 Jan 2017)

Redland reviewed our restructure in 2016, and as part of this each hub was asked to consider how they are meeting our core purposes of worshipping together, joining together in fellowship, and bearing witness in the world.

We discussed this when we met on 22 January, although the discussion was limited by the small numbers attending the meeting. We affirmed our belief that recognising the sacredness of the everyday (as heard recently in ministry during Meeting for Worship) is central to the work of this hub. We see our role as creating space for worship and our community to flourish.

We had a wide ranging discussion on what works well in practice and some possible improvements. We thought that having the sharing circles looking after Sunday morning duties works well, bringing us together and encouraging everyone to participate. We also thought that sharing lunches work well, especially with the addition of talks or films organised by Learning and Action Hub following. The film club is flourishing and convivial.

In terms of our own organisation it is still rather a challenge to hold the hub together - although we now only have quarterly meetings these are not very well attended, and we recognise that the constituent groups in the Faith Community Hub already have their own meetings to attend and responsibilities to hold. We will look again at suitable meeting times, and also use email for exchanging dates and information.

Suggestions to consider included:

- working with the clerk to reduce the length of notices to better integrate the children and young people, and to enable Afterword to work better
- explaining how we organise sharing lunch in more detail and encouraging people to attend in the Elders with Oversight welcome at the end of Meeting for Worship
- extending the sharing circles' Sunday duties to include providing a helper for the CYP group/s

L&A Hub: Vision and practices (24 Oct 2016)

Vision

The Learning & Action (L&A) hub is one of four hubs working collectively to strengthen worship, fellowship and witness in Redland Meeting. Each hub supports all three core purposes, though with different emphases and responsibilities. In L&A hub, our particular responsibility is to help to *equip* people with *resources* to live a richer Quaker life both within and beyond the Meeting. Of course, that is only part of what the Meeting does to help people with that goal, and much of what the hub does depends on and interacts with the work of other hubs.

L&A's emphases are on shared learning, outreach and mutual support for external action. For example, the *Becoming Friends* course helps people to understand practices that have proven effective in supporting Meeting for Worship, the University chaplaincy provides a touchpoint for students interested in Quakers, and the City Of Sanctuary action team helps to focus the Meeting's concern for refugees in Bristol.

With that background, we can attempt to state the hub's vision:

The vision of the Learning & Action hub is to help people to grow spiritually, live well and act effectively in their personal lives and the wider world, by supporting opportunities for learning, outreach and action that look outwards but are rooted in Quaker faith and practice.

Practices

That vision leads to a set of activities that can be collected into four broad areas: Learning, Outreach, Action, and Pulling it all together:

Learning

The aim of the Learning activities in the hub is to help people to discover, explore, understand and act in the world from a Quaker perspective. That involves engaging with Quaker faith and practice, of course, but also the riches of other faith traditions, what is happening in the wider world, and what we might do about it. The current and emerging learning activities in the hub take various forms:

- *Becoming Friends* helps people to explore what Quakers think and do.
- *Meetings for Learning* aim to help us go deeper on particular topics in a worship setting. In 2015-16 these have focussed on experiences and practices that Friends have found valuable in augmenting the Quaker way.
- *Study Groups* enable friends to take some topics further through a series of monthly meetings. Recent topics have included meditation and dialogue practices, poetry and book clubs, life in boarding schools, Quaker history, and attempting a Quaker political analysis.
- The *Library* provides books, journals, course manuals and DVDs on a wide range of topics, made more accessible through regular interactive workshops.
- The monthly *Newsletter* helps friends to share interesting information about what is going on in the Meeting and the wider world.
- Providing information about courses and resources at *Woodbrooke* and elsewhere.
- Supporting the residential weekends at *Ammerdown*. In 2016, the hub took the lead in creating a programme that combined inward-looking practices with outward-looking action.
- *Training in nonviolent action* to be provided by Turning the Tide, with an initial emphasis on supporting the work of the City of Sanctuary External Witness team.

By developing an environment where people feel able to share, discuss, read, converse, become informed, challenge and review, it is envisaged that individual learning is supported too. Although its manifestations may be less obvious or visible than group learning opportunities, this is seen as equally important.

Outreach

Outreach activities take place across the Meeting and are supported in all the hubs, with a key role for the Faith Community hub in encouraging a welcoming environment for enquirers. For its part, the L&A hub supports outreach activities that attempt to provide touchpoints for those who might be drawn to Quakers:

- Redland Meeting's participation in *Quaker Week*.
- Providing a regular Meeting for Worship and information about Quakers at Bristol University.
- Encouraging a Quaker presence at marches and other protests.
- Curating information about Quakers on the *external notice board* and *web site*.
- Extending library and other learning resources to those outside the Meeting.

In addition, the L&A hub has assumed responsibility for maintaining a strategic overview of outreach in the Meeting, and has recently produced a "map" and summary of the various activities contributing to outreach at Redland.

Action

Action in this context refers to actions that aim to improve or influence conditions in local communities, in wider society and in the world, by attending to Quaker principles and practices and bringing these to bear as collective actions in wider arenas. These actions may connect with other groups' actions (Quaker and other) nearby and around the world. Current and emerging activities supported by the hub include:

- Providing information about and encouraging participation in *Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW)* projects
- *Appeals* after Meetings for Worship to raise money for and awareness of charities working in the world. In 2016, we have had a particular emphasis on local work with refugees, QPSW and Motivation (a local charity which provides wheelchairs in developing countries).
- The new *City of Sanctuary* External Witness Team, aiming to focus the Meeting's concern for refugees in Bristol.
- Participation in *Churches Together in Clifton, Cotham and Redland*.
- Support for *individual activists* acting beyond the Meeting, for example through the Activists' Fair at Ammerdown.

Pulling it all together

As well as the specific activities listed above, the hub aims to provide support for the portfolio of activities as a whole. For example, we aim to:

- Provide support for those responsible for a regular activity by, at intervals, collectively reviewing their goals, processes and outcomes, and helping with any difficulties.
- Find Friends to work on the activities, usually through advertising for volunteers
- Review the overall portfolio, occasionally starting new activities or stopping old activities as appropriate. For example, we might ask whether the activities listed in this document are the right ones for 2017.

- Publicise the work of the activities through the newsletter, notices, notice boards and web site.
 - Coordinate events arising from activities to avoid clashes within and across hubs.
- The hub provides this support mainly through the regular L&A Hub Meetings which take place bi-monthly and are open to anyone in the Meeting with an interest in the hub. The hub meetings are organised by the hub coordinators and written notes are circulated widely afterwards. We try to ensure that established activities in the hub are represented at the meetings when possible.

Hopes and aims

If the the L&A hub were successful in achieving its vision, then people in Redland Meeting would:

- Do what we do together with a shared and evolving understanding of Quaker faith and practice, and its meaning for our lives and the wider world.
- Help each other to deepen our worship, fellowship and witness.
- Act effectively in the world, rooted in the Quaker way and engaging with others..
- Welcome those joining us.

And people beyond the Meeting would:

- Notice that Quakers are making a difference in the world
- Have ways to find out more about and experience the Quaker Way

What does the Hub need?

To realise its vision, the L&A hub needs certain resources:

- Small groups of people or individuals prepared to undertake learning and action activities. Those exist, thankfully.
- A forum for exploring the work of those activities individually and as a whole. That's provided by the hub meetings.
- Someone(s) to organise hub-level activities. That's the coordinators.
- Ways of publicising activities so that others can join in. Those are provided by the newsletter and notices, and increasingly by the web site and possibly a dedicated notice board.
- Ways of advertising when help is needed for particular activities. That does not currently exist formally in Redland's hub structure but is part of the recommendations of the recent Structure Review.

Most of what we need is in place. The main shortfall is in a mechanism for advertising for help beyond the hub itself.

Resources Hub (14 Sept 2016)

Issues from the Structure Review: We were asked to consider three recommendations from the review thus;

- *R1 Consideration of the combination of Hubs operating.* It was thought that combining the Admin and Resources Hubs would be too cumbersome. The responsibilities of the Resources Hub for premises particularly at and following a quinquennial survey require substantial time. It might be that the F&C and L&A Hubs would benefit from joining together.
- *R2 Assistance with strengthening our core purposes of worship fellowship and witness.* The

hub members want the buildings we use to reflect our Quakerism, values and testimonies and we hope this is demonstrated by the changes and improvements we make.

- *R3 How can Hubs encourage participation around membership and recruitment and give more clarity as to how things are done.* We hope that there is a lot of encouragement for ensuring an appropriate welcome for newcomers and enquirers. The front lobby noticeboards will benefit from a change as they are often where people first look. We felt that the use of Redland for rough sleepers (if it were being considered) would conflict with the use of the meeting house by the playgroup and would not be appropriate.

Administration Hub (22 Sept 2016)

1. Question from the structural review: how can this Hub best strengthen the meeting's core purposes (of worship, fellowship and witness)?

The Administration Hub provides the meeting with an **information** infrastructure that makes a clear context for our worship, and makes the structure of our community visible to us. It also plays a part in the **organisation** of our meeting by upholding a business framework that is Quakerly, inclusive, light touch and oriented towards action. The name 'administration' has a possibly old-fashioned ring to it.

(a) **Information:** the Hub maintains key information about our meeting, including who's in our meeting, what circles people are in, who does what in our meeting, and what's going on; it produces an ongoing official and historical record of the meeting; it organises and oversees the display of accurate information about our meeting and about Quakers and Quakerism more generally, on the website, noticeboards and elsewhere; and it acts as a conduit for information coming into and going out of our meeting.

(b) **Organisation:** the Hub finds people to serve in core roles; it allocates people to sharing circles; and it conducts our local meeting for business, ensuring the decisions it agrees are carried out.

2. Question from the structural review: should Admin combine with Resources to make a single Hub ('Community Resources & Communications')?

Resources Hub has finance, property and employees (wardens) under its remit, so might be thought already too large to merge with Admin. However, Resources' areas have increasingly come under the management of the Trustees' subcommittees in recent years, so the local input has correspondingly reduced somewhat. There could be some sense in bringing these different kinds of resource together in an infrastructural or 'back office' hub (with Faith Community as 'main office' and L&A as 'front office'). Perhaps we could keep the question open if Resources or MfB don't want a merger just now.

Compiled by Ian Beeson from Hub records/messages