

## Diversity & Inclusion

### Background

In 2017, Yearly Meeting asked Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) to consider diversity in our committee and organisational structures, and particularly to look at how Quakers can remove barriers and actively seek wider participation in the full life of our meetings.

Area Meetings and committees were asked to consider this, using three questions. To help MfS with this work, BYM employed an Inclusion and Diversity Co-ordinator. The purpose of this temporary post is to help all Quakers in Britain consider diversity and how best to be fully inclusive; and to decide what needs to be done next.

Edwina Peart started work in June 2018. Since then she has:

- collected responses from AMs and committees
- conducted a survey
- organised a national gathering
- met with and listened to Quaker meetings, committees, groups and individuals
- provided advice, guidance and practical help
- supported Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee which has been preparing a Yearly Meeting to examine our privileges and assumptions of privilege
- worked closely with Woodbrooke and with Nim Njuguna whose Eva Koch scholarship focused on 'Becoming Diversity Champions'
- researched previous Quaker discernment and action
- gathered insights and ideas from other faith groups, Yearly Meetings and organisations

Edwina Peart brought an interim report to MfS in October last year. MfS/18/10/11 noted *'Meetings and committees are strongly encouraged to start or continue how we can remove barriers and seek wider participation...'*

This is Edwina's second report to MfS. At our meeting she will explain more about her work and insights, and we will have time to reflect together in small groups as well as in plenary.

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### Introduction

Thank you for inviting me back to Meeting for Sufferings. I appreciate it and want to make the best use of this opportunity to update you on what I have been doing; share information on what I have learned about who we are as Quakers; give some indication as to what needs to happen to continue to support and develop this area of work further.

This paper builds on my first report and offers a definition of diversity that I have found useful as a working tool. It provides an update on additional responses received to the three questions initially sent out by MfS. The diversity and inclusion survey, its shortcomings and some provisional findings will be discussed. The national gathering on diversity and inclusion held at Woodbrooke in January 2019 will also be addressed, both as an important piece of work that I have organised and in terms of its impact and reception based on evaluation reports and written comments received so far.

I present this information as sources of data that contribute to building a nuanced picture of where we are as a faith community, which in turn speaks to our potential direction of travel. I will give a brief overview of what I have been doing, including areas of work I have wished to develop but have been unable to. The final section will suggest some principles for moving forward.

### **Defining diversity and inclusion**

Without a clear definition it is difficult to form goals, develop strategies or measure progress. My working definition is:

Diversity is any dimension that can be used to differentiate individuals and groups of people from one another. This can be in terms of protected characteristics outlined in the 2010 Equalities Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) and also dimensions such as language and class. When we embrace and celebrate our rich differences, power is unleashed.

Inclusion describes the efforts and practices that enable and support the equal treatment of difference, including those that are self-evident or inherent. Diversity and inclusion involve inward and outward perspectives.

### **Responses to MfS questions**

As a reminder the questions were

1. In what ways is your meeting already diverse?
2. In what ways could it be more diverse?
3. What would help it become more diverse? What are the opportunities and barriers?

These questions were sent to all meetings/groups/committees. Responses were varied ranging from individual to area, a minute to a report of a workshop held to discuss the issues. The following brief analysis has to be read alongside the initial analysis (in my October 2018 report to MfS) offered. I have received 11 additional responses taking the overall total to 49. The detail reflects my developing understanding of Quaker structure and practices, as well as my own observations and ongoing conversations with Friends.

#### **1. In what ways is your meeting already diverse?**

Quaker groups that are convened around specific issues, or for particular constituents often assert greater diversity than areas or local meetings do. Women are well represented, as is sexuality and geographical location. There is some diversity in age range, career stage, personal experience and urban and rural settings. Much is made of the difference between urban and rural communities and the implications this has for diversity. There is a tendency to claim diversity as something we do, i.e. in various aspects of our work, rather than who we are.

## **2. In what ways could it be more diverse?**

We do not represent the diversity of British society, however beneath our superficial similarities lie a range of diverse identities, experiences and perspectives. I find this point very interesting. It picks up what cultural critic Stuart Hall, called “gross physical signifiers” and suggests we cannot rely upon them as indicators of diversity. They often mask less visible differences and do not necessarily reflect power and privilege. We are not racially or socially diverse.

## **3. What would help it become more diverse? What are the opportunities and barriers?**

Barriers to diversity that are frequently mentioned are the restrictions imposed by the social, cultural and geographical environment and infrastructure. These include physical location of the meeting house, the social and economic composition of the surrounding area and services such as public transport. Quaker organisation in terms of day and time of meeting, the length of service required and the intensity of commitment demanded of role holders are all raised as factors that restrict wide participation.

Reading through the ideas listed that might help increase diversity, it struck me that these can also be the benefits of diversity. For example, encouraging family activities, older Friends becoming more computer literate, encouraging more discussion about spirituality and Quaker structure. A recurring underlying point is that change will only happen when diversity is made a priority. There is good practice that already exists.

Some committees have a specified number of young adult Quakers in their membership. This approach could be widely adopted by nominations committees who could seek to assess diversity as is currently represented and the gaps. The difficulty of such a process does not mean we shouldn't try. Rich conversation and deep worship can be experienced in meetings that are not face to face. It is liberating to experience this and include it as an additional way of working together. New ways of sharing information, different styles of engagement can be imagined more creatively as a way of facilitating greater inclusion.

Some response spoke poignantly of the ways in which particular practices, such as the creation of a minute that captures the sense of a meeting, can also leave a wider information gap. This is filled by informal reporting and sharing of experiences within what is often perceived as an inner circle. This isolates newcomers and those outside of this network. Transparency in structure and decision making promotes inclusion. Prioritising diversity could allow our work to reach more groups and increase social inclusion within British society.

## **Diversity and inclusion survey**

I initiated and ran the survey as an important part of scoping the Quaker community. The purpose is to provide a baseline audit, to tell us something about Quakers in Britain today. It requests individual responses. The following analysis of the data gathered from the survey is preliminary. At the time of writing this report, the survey is still open. More importantly, I have not had the time necessary for detailed examination. However, I wanted to give a flavour of the issues the survey has raised, the responses, and to start the process of considering what this might mean and what it might indicate for future work. 1693 people responded. A handful spoilt their forms with nursery rhymes and “none of your business” as answers. The vast majority, over 99% engaged with the questions even when they felt it was impossible to answer them all. I found many of the comments in the additional information box illuminating.

The first thing to note is that I make no claims of representation. It is a self-selecting sample. This means that everything that follows is not true of the Quaker community, but only of the less than 10% of the community that responded to the survey. Within this, it is the largest survey that I am aware of that has been undertaken with British Quakers. As part of this, later I will try to plot the geographical spread of answers, possibly correlating this to the spread of meetings that responded to the initial three questions. Question 7, which requests information on physical, sensory, learning or mental health impairments has provided rich detail. I cannot do this justice here, but will analyse and write this up as part of a full report on the survey. For this paper I want to introduce the range of answers given to some questions and comment briefly on the implications of this.

### **Q1 Ethnicity**

Responses were almost completely white British/European, including Welsh, Scottish and Irish. This category also included white mixed. 26 respondents identified as mixed race, black British, British Asian, British Chinese, black Caribbean and black African. This is roughly 1.5%. 14 respondents identified as Jewish, 0.8% roughly. Two points of interest arise for me. Firstly, the mixed race population is young, which corresponds to anecdotal evidence gathered on my visits to meetings. Many people spoke of their mixed race grandchildren. Secondly, the category was completely open and many comments were made about the irrelevance of this question, yet the answers were surprisingly uniform. There was only one response that I had to look up.

### **Q2 Nationality**

As expected, this category was mostly British, which includes Welsh, Scottish and Irish. 47 respondents identified as European nationals, just over 2.5%. American, Canadian, Australian and a sprinkling of South African nationalities are also present. The greater presence of “other” white nationalities compared to British black or Asian people is worth noting. Is race more significant than culture?

### **Q3 Age**

187 respondents are aged under 40, this is just over 11%. I found this figure surprising. It may be that those under 40 are more comfortable with surveys and divulging personal information. More work needs to be done on this question with possible comparisons made to the data held in the tabular statement.

### **Q5 Sexual orientation**

251 respondents identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer and fluid. This is over 14% of respondents. Clearly this is an area in which a range of difference finds a place. It is a difference that is not necessarily apparent. It is an area in which Quakers have done a lot of work and have led the faith community on same sex marriage. I feel that the very public support that Quakers have demonstrated in this area of inequality and the many discussions that have taken place in the community have contributed to this being a welcoming and safe space. It is impossible to know whether gay, lesbian and bisexual people have carved a space for themselves within Quakers or the community more widely created a space within which these groups feel welcome. Either way this has implications for where we choose to focus our energy in the future.

### **Q6 Gender**

31 people identified as non-binary, transgender, agender, intersex, gender fluid and androgynous. This is just under 2%. Some respondents chose terms such as cisgender indicating their awareness of current debates and emerging terms for engaging with this. Others identified as "normal." The range suggests that the gender diversity debate is not an issue that exists only in the wider society and it is one we can't choose to ignore.

### **Q7 Class**

128 people identified as working class, 7.5%. This fits in with the self-image of Quakers as a middle class, well-educated community. Of interest to me is the fact that many who identified as working class included prefixes such as educated, or justifications for claiming this such as housing situation. I am reminded that on visits to Quaker meetings I am often told that an assumption is made regarding the class of members and attenders that is not necessarily correct. However, as the default it is difficult to refute. This also has implications for how information is shared and the reimbursement process for expenses. In my own work I have tried to access funds prior to spending on travel, childcare and necessary purchases and this has been difficult.

### **Q8 Additional information**

314 people provided additional information. Roughly 66% did not say what they thought of the survey overall. Of the remaining 33%, this was evenly split between those thinking it was a waste of time and those thanking me. Many people used this section to identify other aspects of diversity that were not raised. Language is one that is mentioned frequently, north and south disparities, the lack of conservatives (party political and theological) and a background or connection to Quakers. Many lamented the use of and need for labels. A feeling emerging from this information is that Quakers who are interested in diversity and inclusion can satisfy this urge through activism, for example, through work in prisons or in specific campaigns. Others are focussed on searching for spiritual understanding and community. I think these aspects can be usefully combined to the benefit of both.

The following is an excerpt from an email that was shared with me.

“I want community, moral guidance, space to think, and above all responsibility for myself, my thoughts and actions. For me, the core message of Quaker meeting is love – love yourself, love your fellow people, love the planet – and I think the world today is in desperate need of this message. Using the meeting as a welcoming and safe space to start an inward dialogue and feel supported and accepted by a group would be an amazing thing for so many.”

For me, this strikes at the heart of diversity and inclusion.

### **National gathering on diversity and inclusion**

The advert for the event read:

“A diverse and inclusive community where all are welcomed has been an ever present aspiration for Quakers. This conference aims to equip Friends to make it a reality, offering key note speeches, workshops and opportunities for informal discussion. It aims to raise and explore issues of inclusion and diversity paying particular attention to current manifestations. It does this within a larger context of faith organisations and individual responsibility. We welcome everyone with an interest in this area.”

50 people attended the gathering. The aim was to raise awareness and start a conversation. It was challenging and uncomfortable, but I feel the aims were met. The following quotes have been taken from the reports we were sent and evaluations forms. My sense is that they capture the essence of the gathering more clearly than my words can and include thoughts from conversations that I was not a part of.

“Throughout the weekend we constantly returned to the realisation that the way in which class, gender, race, physical or mental impairment create gateways are all just symptoms of the same malaise, the difficulty people have in treating others with respect, dignity, love, that Jesus demanded of us, the need to answer that of God in everybody. If sin is falling short, then we have all sinned, can we take such a realisation into the silence and hold it in the light? Can we forgive ourselves and change our attitudes, give up our undeserved invisible power, and gain the true power of community?”

“On Sunday, reeling from Saturday’s information overload, we turned to how to take things forward.

We had recognised the mission and leadership of our speakers – and asked why do Friends struggle with the whole idea of leadership these days, when historically we have named and respected leaders? We found it is becoming more difficult to locate Quakers in a shared Spirituality, but perhaps more in our shared behaviour. So is our white, middle classness (etc.) important, can we break out of it? Some asked, how do we really feel about evangelism? Do we want more, or different Quakers?

Someone said, “It’s not just what we do that matters, it is how we are.” We do need leaders from wider backgrounds. We cannot change our own backgrounds, BUT we can become gateways, not gatekeepers.”

“The last day was challenging in relation to the robust discussion held during worship on the Sunday morning. I reflected on this for about a week afterwards. This said, it was also good, however uncomfortable to hear both sides and to just feel the anger and emotion of the person. On reflection, I feel that this could actually have been an example of the Spirit ‘doing stuff’. It’s reality. Gritty realism confronting an issue directly, not something we Brits are typically good at.”

“Friends are aware of race and gender issues, but often remarkably uniformed about class issues. Middle class people tend to think that ours is the ‘default’ position and that our values are the right values. We need our eyes to be opened.”

“A first step is to examine our personal perspectives in relation to issues of equality and diversity in the public realm, to take seriously the information that casts light upon our own prejudices and privileges and thereby shows us something about our unearned advantages and the power these give us. Becoming aware of our invisible badges is a first step to seeing how these might deter others.

In the gathering we were prompted to recognise aspects of inequality and injustice in our history and currently; I realised later that the prompts were mostly reminders rather than new information. This made me wonder: do we really not know about – or do we turn a blind eye to – the impact of inequality and exclusion in our society and within the Society of Friends in particular? Do we not notice, because we are used to living within the comfort zone of our familiar lives and Meetings, the ways in which systems have come to disadvantage many and to privilege a few?”

## **Diversity and inclusion project**

### **What else have I done?**

In addition to the survey and national gathering I have visited a number of local and area meetings, both leading and participating in workshops and discussions. I am working with Brighton to run a series of meetings exploring gender diversity in a faith based and loving way. We have held the first of these sessions successfully. Two more are planned. I am working with Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee (and have found this fruitful and informative) and am scheduled to run a parallel session on the work of this project at Yearly Meeting. I act as a point of contact for staff and members of the wider Quaker community on issues of diversity and inclusion. This includes suggesting materials, discussing formats, providing advice and listening to the concerns that are expressed.

I have developed links with the Vibrancy Project, Quaker Life and Young Adults Project. This is deepening my understanding of the range of views and positions held on these issues across the community. I am also developing my ability to cultivate specific approaches for different contexts. There is much work to be done, but there is also a genuine wish to meaningfully engage with issues of equality. The pace, support offered and way topics are raised is critical.

I have yet to develop pilot projects in the manner I initially envisaged. This is still something I think is important. I would like to initiate work on some of the ideas generated from the gathering, alongside contributing to racial justice Sunday, for example, and work with Nim Njuguna to develop diversity allies. I want to do further work on the data gathered from the survey and work with Woodbrooke to develop a programme that supports this area of work. I have already committed to a course in 2020.

I believe that the project is having a positive impact and that important work is being initiated. I would like to see this continue. I would like to be a part of embedding it in the Quaker faith community. It is part of Quaker values. Expectations have been raised and a process begun, I want to build upon this momentum. The principles that I believe should guide this are

- Nuanced, bespoke activities that start where we are. This differs across the country, committees and across issues
- An approach that comprises individual, community, country and international elements. All of these are important and the links between them strengthens each element
- Consistence in maintaining diversity and inclusion as a priority, albeit with a flexible emphasis that takes account of changing circumstances.

I have learned from working with Friends that listening and walking alongside them as they think about and act on their personal promptings brings beautiful results. Results that go further and reach deeper than I have imagined.

Edwina Peart  
Diversity and Inclusion Co-ordinator