

Meeting for Learning working group

PART A: REPORT

Introduction

A small group of Meeting for Learning facilitators and previous Quaker Learning Australia (QLA) Committee members met by Zoom and email in August 2022 to consider ways forward for Meeting for Learning, as the QLA Committee was laid down in 2021 and no Regional Meeting (RM) has offered to host the Committee. We picked up the work on this proposal again in January '23.

Summary

We recommend that Meeting for Learning continue in its current form.

We suggest that a new Committee, perhaps called the Meeting for Learning Support Committee, be established.

See Part B for details.

Background

Meeting for Learning is a travelling one-year program running from Spring one year to Spring the following year. The participants attend a week-long retreat at both the beginning and end of the year. A Regional Meeting invites Meeting for Learning to run a program, and the two retreats for that year are held there.

When Meeting for Learning first came into being (1995) it was managed by a Committee based in Victoria Regional Meeting (VRM). When a group in South Australia and Northern Territory Regional Meeting (SANTRM) took over the work in 2008 they offered themselves as a lily pad (rather than an umbrella) which supported further Quaker educational activities as well as the Meeting for Learning program. The Committee was renamed Quaker Learning Australia under Australia Yearly Meeting (AYM).

Over the years the QLA Committee responsibilities have been passed on to groups in other Regional Meetings. During this time Silver Wattle Quaker Centre has become an established base for Quaker education in Australia.

Since 2021 no group in any Regional Meeting has felt led to take on the work of QLA. In its absence, support of the 2022 Meeting for Learning was provided by Sharon Matthews (WARM) and David Barry (SANTRM) sharing administrative and organisational roles. The organisation and support of Meeting for Learning now needs a clearer way forward. Other aspects of the QLA Committee may also need to be considered such as the provision of the Quaker Basics course materials and resource books.

Looking to the Future:

We see that the original intentions for a QLA Committee are now met in different ways. Silver Wattle provides opportunities for Quaker learning, both residential and online. And particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, many opportunities for on-line learning, Worship, interest groups and community deepening have emerged. Some of the "home groups" from AYM 2022 have continued to meet by Zoom, for example. However, we feel there is still a need for a MFL program which travels to interested Regional Meetings. Interest in MFL continues and the facilitators still receive feedback that at least some participants come because the program travels to their State.

We propose the following model for the support of Meeting for Learning only, not for a wider role:

Three strands of Meeting for Learning tasks and role

1. An Australia Yearly Meeting (AYM) Committee called Meeting for Learning Support Committee links the Meeting for Learning facilitators and the host RM.

They look after the timeline, advertising the retreat early in the calendar year, and later if needs be.

They handle the financial transactions in conjunction with the AYM office, sending invoices to the retreatants, receiving the invoice from the venue and the travel invoices from the facilitators.

They report to AYM, including bringing to AYM any leading from a RM to host the Meeting for Learning program in the future.

2. The facilitators plan and lead the retreat week programs and support participants during their year.

They receive expressions of interest from people who want to participate in Meeting for Learning, and they decide who will be accepted for the coming year.

They update the AYM Committee and the Hosting Group with details about who is coming (including continuing retreatants), if there are any vacancies, and any other matters as needed.

3. A small group (the Hosting Group), within the RM who has invited Meeting for Learning to come to them, takes on the role of hosting the retreats.

It is up to that RM how they do this. We have a document that lists what the facilitators need from them – the key one being, in consultation with the facilitators, finding the venue! Then liaising with retreatants about meals, accommodation, special needs. They coordinate transport to and from the venue, make sure we have appropriate resources such as whiteboards.

PART B: ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. We recommend that Meeting for Learning continue in its current form.
2. We suggest that a new AYM Committee, perhaps called the Meeting for Learning Support Committee, be established as:
 - a) An “interest” committee of four Friends, from anywhere in Australia
 - b) Main tasks, the administration and oversight of Meeting for Learning, including handling finances, publicity, timelines, liaison with the facilitators and the host Regional Meeting
 - c) Report to AYM.
 - d) To meet as often as the work requires
 - e) Initial nominations perhaps after calling for expressions of interest. There is a wide “alumnus” of previous participants who may be interested.
3. The Host RM and the facilitators would continue as outlined above.
4. We would suggest that the Meeting for Learning Support Committee consider having its own email address. It’s also possible that the Committee may feel led to manage a Meeting for Learning webpage.
5. We suggest that the current Facilitators and David Barry as the SANTRM host RM and Sharon Mathews from WARM continue as a Working Group to support MFL for 2023 in the interim.

Submitted by: David Barry (SANTRM), Fiona Gardner (VRM), Catherine Heywood (VRM), Sharon Mathews (WARM), Brenda Roy (WARM), Jenny Spinks (CRQ)