

**Preparatory Session Report
YM23**

Preparatory Session	QSA & AYM Relationship Working Group
Facilitator: David Purnell	Note taker: Rae Litting

Report: The preparatory session was held via zoom on 26 May 2023, and was attended by 27 Friends. After silent worship and acknowledgement of country, the meeting heard a summary from David Purnell of the AYM/QSA Committee report in DIA23, and additional comments from the other Committee members as follows:

- Mary Jane Hogan briefly covered the background to the work of the committee, including a review of all previous documents, and described the guiding principles under which the report was developed. Some findings of the earlier Working Group had been dealt with, but the remaining issue was the suggestion that we seek to return to the “committee of the whole”, rather than having a main committee and a Linkages Group. The AYM/QSA Committee was seeking a structure which would provide good governance for Quaker Service Australia and a good relationship with Australia Yearly Meeting.
- Rae Litting introduced Pia Reierson (the new QSA administrator) who joined the meeting from Norway. Pia talked about her previous experience in the NGO sector, and her desire to work with Friends to build an even better QSA. Rae Litting briefly covered recent changes in QSA management, largely resulting from the Covid lockdown in which staff had to work from home – and enjoyed doing so. This requires changes to the computer systems, especially a move from a paper filing system to on-line data storage, and a better on-line system for sharing information. Pia has been overseeing these changes. Rae also spoke to the retirement of our volunteer finance officer, and the appointment of a paid finance officer who is a qualified accountant. This person is currently working one day a week to update and rationalise the accounting system, but it is anticipated that he will eventually work for half a day a week. Another planned change is a move from the Stanmore office to an office attached to Wahroonga Meeting House where Pia will work with some volunteer assistance. There are also plans to hire an office space where all staff can meet and work together, probably for one day a week.
- Duncan Frewin spoke to his concern that there be good communication between QSA and AYM. He acknowledged that some people felt remote from QSA, and reminded Friends of the availability of the regular QSA newsletter. He urged Friends and RMs to take responsibility to contact QSA if they have questions about projects or QSA’s procedures, and to ask for Webinars on particular topics of interest.

David Purnell summarised the RM responses to the proposed new arrangements. There was general affirmation of the AYM/QSA Committee’s proposals as appropriate for the current needs of QSA and AYM, as well as concern in one RM that communication between QSA and RMs would need to be strengthened and should be given more time for discernment. A suggested change to the process of appointing members to the board was accepted, to ensure that AYM makes the appointments.

During question time, the legal implications of the changes were raised. These covered questions about the need to change the QSA constitution. Bruce Henry (AYM Presiding Clerk) reported that Alan Clayton (VRM) had assessed the QSA constitution and was of the view that

the proposed changes do not present any great problems or issues, as they involve a recalibration of the nature, appointment etc of the governing board of QSA.

The ability of the new QSA board to communicate by zoom only was discussed, as was the need for the board to have the right skills and experience. Mary Jane Hogan reported that, to avoid confusion, the 'management committee' would become a 'Board' to reflect that the members are directors of the company, and that the management is in the hands of the staff.

The session concluded with a summary of the session and a period of silence.

Recommendations in your Report which you will bring to Yearly Meeting:

1. That, to enhance the effectiveness of the oversight of QSA policies and operations, the membership of the QSA Management Committee be increased from seven to nine (including office bearers)
2. That, instead of being hosted by a Regional Meeting (at present NSW), QSA be hosted by Australia Yearly Meeting. In that situation, names would be put forward by the Nominations Committee of AYM in consultation with the present Management Committee of QSA and other stakeholders, and members would be identified from anywhere in Australia. The appointments to the Management Committee would then be made by Yearly Meeting (after feedback from Regional Meetings).
3. That the current Management Committee and officers of QSA advise the AYM Nominations Committee of the skills and knowledge needed for the effective oversight of QSA as vacancies occur, to assist in the selection of names for appointment.
4. That the Linkages Committee be discontinued, and replaced by regular opportunities for Quakers to interact with QSA through webinars offered by QSA for sharing of information and ideas. In addition to these webinars offered by QSA, any Regional Meeting could ask QSA for a meeting of this kind, and QSA would also use Yearly Meeting gatherings, newsletters and other ongoing communication methods to keep Quakers informed and receive feedback.
5. That appropriate legal advice be sought by AYM and QSA about the implications of these changes for QSA's standing as a company, so that AYM and QSA can have the necessary background to make a decision on changes in the governance arrangements as proposed. (Note – there may be some confusion caused by naming the oversight body 'the Management Committee' rather than 'The Board', and this point might be clarified by legal advice about the requirements expected of a company).