

MEMBERSHIP OF QUAKERS IN LONDON

Membership Process, proposed approach for consideration

Background: In January 2027, London's seven Area Meetings, along with London Quaker Property Trust, will come together to form Quakers in London (QIL), a single London Area Meeting. The new LAM will hold membership for all Friends across London. Getting the membership process right (clear, consistent, and rooted in good discernment), is therefore a spiritually foundational task before us.

Quaker Faith and Practice (chapter 11) sets out principles and gives guidance but allows flexibility in how area meetings implement them. The seven current London AMs have each developed their own practices. As we come together, we have an opportunity to agree on a shared approach, drawing on the best of existing practice, but ultimately creating something exciting and new, future-facing, and suitable for the new Quakers in London..

At the Joint London Area Meeting on 07 March, discussions around a potential membership leaflet revealed that some underlying questions regarding the process remain unsettled. This paper therefore takes a step back and proposes a process for QIL to adopt and draws out specific points where we feel Friends may wish to discern more deeply.

The proposed membership process

Step 0: Nurture and Support (always)

The nurture and support of all who worship with us - regular attenders, members, and one-off visitors alike, is a core responsibility of every Friend, every local meeting, and every elder and pastoral care team. This is not a step in a process. It is a core expression of our faith, and who we are.

For Attenders, considering membership may include reading literature about Quaker life and membership, attending a Becoming Quakers session, ensuring they have the opportunity to attend meetings for worship and business, offering a mentor or buddy, or holding spiritual conversations about membership when the time feels right. But nurture is never solely oriented toward membership. Whether a Friend eventually enters into membership or not, we are called to welcome them with love, to walk alongside them, and to support their spiritual journey.

Friends should take care that attenders do not feel undue pressure to seek membership. The decision to apply is a personal and spiritual one, to be made freely and in one's own time. Our role is to create the conditions in which that discernment can happen - not to hasten. And if a Friend should choose never to enter into Membership, they will receive our kindness and love all the same.

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Step 1: Initiating an Application

QFP 11.11 sets out the possible ways an application may be initiated.

- A. Attender initiator: The individual writes a letter or email to the Quakers in London Membership Clerk expressing their wish to become a member.
- B. Befriending group: The applicant, together with elders or pastoral care Friends from their local meeting, forms a befriending group to explore membership over a period of time. The group jointly prepares a report to bring to QiL and sends it to the Membership Clerk.
- C. Route C: Meeting-initiated. With the express written consent of the attender, elders or pastoral care Friends of the local meeting may apply to QiL on the attender's behalf. This route is intended for experienced attenders who for various personal reasons have not taken the step of applying themselves. If offered, it must be made clear to the attender at the outset that there is no expectation or pressure to proceed. The application should be sent to the Membership Clerk.

DISCERNMENT REQUIRED: Does QiL wish to offer route C?

Should we offer meeting/Elder-initiated applications? There may be occasions where an attender has been a longstanding member of the community, who is deeply Quaker in spirit and richly connected to the community. This route would be intended for experienced attenders who have never taken the step of applying themselves. Should Quakers in London offer a route whereby elders or pastoral care Friends may, with the consent of the attender and with the offer of a discussion with another Friend, apply to QiL on their behalf?

Step 2: Receipt by Membership Clerk and referral to local meeting

On receipt of an application (by any route), the QiL Membership Clerk:

1. Acknowledges receipt and confirms contact details with the applicant. Shares information on the application process.
2. Refers the application to the individual's local meeting's elders and pastoral care team for their consideration of whether the application is timely. E&PC teams should share their considerations with the Membership Clerk. (They do not have a formal power of veto, but their view informs the appointment of visitors.)

Step 3: The appointment of visitors (for route A)

The membership clerk will ask the local meeting E&PC team if can they offer the name for one of the two visitors.

The membership clerk, in partnership with EPCC, will seek to find a second visitor from a different LM.

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DISCERNMENT REQUIRED: does QiL wish to delegate this authority to the Membership Clerk?

The membership clerk notifies both visitors and the applicant of their appointment and provides visitors with a copy of the QiL Guidelines for Membership Visitors.

Step 4: The visit (for route A)

Visitors arrange a meeting with the applicant at a time and place of the applicant's choosing. This could be the individual's home, a meeting house, or another public place. Visitors should be led by what the applicant feels most comfortable with.

The visit:

- Begins and ends with a period of silent worship
- Is conducted in a spirit of sharing, not examination
- Covers the applicant's spiritual journey, understanding of Quaker worship, Quaker testimonies, and the responsibilities of membership
- Should be sensitive, flexible, and tactful

If, during the visit, concerns arise about the applicant's readiness for membership, visitors should raise these with the applicant directly and consider recommending a second visit. Visitors should discuss any concerns with the local meeting's elders before finalising their report.

Visitors should be prepared to write a report after their visit. This may require the taking of notes throughout the visit.

Step 5: The report (for route A)

Following the visit:

- If the applicant wishes any matter of a personal or sensitive nature to be excluded from the report, this should be agreed and noted
- One visitor drafts a report and shares it with the other visitor for discussion and agreement
- The agreed draft is shared with the applicant for review, both for factual accuracy and to ensure they are comfortable with the content being shared more widely.
- The applicant is asked to confirm [in writing] that they have reviewed the report and are content with it
- Both visitors sign the final report and submit it to the QiL Membership Clerk in advance of the next QiL Meeting for Worship for Business.

The report does not make a recommendation. It provides information to enable QiL to discern.

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Step 6: Discernment at QiL

The report is brought before QiL. The visitors should, as far as is possible, be present for the membership report to come to QiL. When the report comes to QiL, the following should happen:

DISCERNMENT REQUIRED:

Attendees must leave the room during consideration of membership reports;

Attendees may remain in the room and contribute fully to discernment.

- If present, The applicant is asked to leave the room, ideally accompanied by another Friend; for example a member of QIL Elders & Pastoral Care team.
- The report is read aloud by one of their visitors or failing that, the QiL membership clerk. Reports should be read in full rather than summarised: this is an important stage in each person's journey and hearing the reports is an inspiring part of our Area Meetings.

We also remind Friends that reports remain confidential to the people who have heard them, although the applicant may share their own report if they wish.

- Discernment takes place amongst Friends on whether now is the right time for a Friend to come into membership.
- Clerks minute the decision

Step 7: Notification and welcome (routes A,B & C)

The Friend returns into the room. The Clerk notifies the applicant of the outcome.

- **If accepted:**
 - if the applicant is present, in person at the meeting.
 - if the applicant is not present, or by a Friend from their local meeting as soon as possible thereafter, followed by written confirmation from the Membership Clerk
- **If not accepted:**
 - If the applicant is present, in person at the meeting. Support should be made available on the day from a member of the E&PC team, and a sensitive pastoral conversation should be arranged by the local meeting E&PC team in the following days.

The Membership Clerk then updates the QiL membership register.

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On acceptance, the local meeting welcomes its new member. Some mark the occasion with an announcement at meeting, with cake and coffee afterwards. Some give a trial 6 week subscription to *The Friend*. Others welcome new members quietly.