## 27 October 2020

Britain is currently going through a shared social experience that is making us re-think the lives that we have become so used to. As a result of that we are being forced to significantly change our practices as communities. This is a developing collection of thoughts about how we connect with and support one another during these uncertain times.

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# General introduction 03 April 2020

Meetings for worship for business can be held online. There are many international Quaker committees that do this. There are also meetings and committees in our yearly meeting that have experience of online meetings for worship for business. So long as we can share the insights we have been given (by being able to speak to each other) and are engaged in the same exercise of waiting on guidance, discernment can happen.

Many of our practices will be the same as when we meet in person. This document looks at the differences in our practice when meeting online.

When we don’t meet in person, we may find the Quaker business method feels slightly different. But we are still seeking to find the sense of the meeting.

It is not always easy to make decisions remotely. We all need to have more patience: with technology and with each other. It can feel slower, and it is harder to read visual cues.

A social time for everyone might be useful either before or after the meeting, where participants can share news and chat.

# Videoconferencing and teleconferencing 03 April 2020

This document presumes that you are familiar with meetings for worship for business, and online meetings for worship, as well as at least one form of holding online conversations. (See at the end of this document for where to seek advice or training).

Using videoconferencing or teleconferencing is a way to make decisions together. It is not the same as being in a physical room together. People can join by themselves, or as a couple or household. Sometimes it works better if every single participant uses a separate device (computer or telephone), but that needs to be balanced against the technological challenge of having more devices connected to the meeting.

The meeting for worship for business can feel slower. It is harder to read visual cues and may be easier to miss body language and tone of voice. Using technology can exclude some Friends, as not everyone finds video or audio technology accessible. Other Friends, such as those who are living at a distance or are less mobile, may find it more accessible.

Whatever technology is used, it is helpful to allow some time near the beginning for Friends to become familiar with it. When using new tools within the software, such as sharing a screen or a presentation, you need to allow time to understand how they work, and for other participants’ screens to catch up. People using telephones to dial in to an internet-based meeting will not be able to see presentations or participants.

We suggest that the same technology is used for online meetings for worship for business that your community uses for your online meetings for worship.

If you change settings to allow screen sharing during a meeting for worship for business, you may need to change that back again at the end of the meeting.

Remember that sound and picture can be interrupted. Try to speak slower, and start by giving your name each time, as we can sound slightly different on the phone or video link. Much of the usual advice, such as this section from *Quaker faith & practice* 3.10, still applies:

Give your whole attention to the matter before the meeting. If you want to speak, try to sum up what you have to say in as few words as possible. Speak simply and audibly, but do not speak for effect. A pause after each contribution will enable what has been said to find its right place in the mind of the meeting. Do not repeat views which you have already expressed. Do not address another Friend across the room but speak to the meeting as a whole. Be ready to submit to the direction of the clerk. …

Trustee bodies should check to see if their governing document permits decisions to be made by videoconference or teleconference.

# The meeting for worship for business 03 April 2020

The meeting may find it helpful if clerks circulate draft minutes in advance – regular or usual items may be better taken on draft minute. Although it can be possible to share screens, sharing minutes in progress may divert attention. Paying attention to a screen for an extended period can be very tiring, so the meeting may find it easier if the clerks can plan the agenda for shorter meetings than you might have in person, even if it means meeting more often, and consider allowing time for breaks.

If you can, mute your own microphone when you are not speaking. In some systems, the “host” (who can be the clerk or an elder) is able to mute everyone and just unmute people when they are called to speak. If a system permits co-hosts, this can make the clerk’s task easier.

At the beginning of the meeting, the clerk should let Friends know how to express an interest in making a contribution to an item of business. For example, Friends could raise their hand so it is in the picture, use the raise hand function or chat facility available in some software, or say their name. The clerk should then choose who to call to speak. In choosing how to use a piece of software, it can be helpful to think about creating a level playing field. For example, if some people present are unable to use a video function because of bandwidth problems or not having a webcam, it can be better if everyone turns their video off and focusses on the audio channel.

We suggest that except for very small business meetings, it is helpful to have someone in charge of going through the agenda and a different person writing the minutes. These might be co-clerks.

If possible, the co-clerks should be in touch privately using a chat facility in the online platform, or in some other way such using a messaging system. This could help them to discern the feeling of the meeting, or any of the many other quiet exchanges that usually take place between clerks.

It is useful if the clerk will try to sum up what the decision is before a minute is written (or amended) and then if anyone feels that is not the right decision they can say so before the minute is worked on. But remember our advice that draft minutes should be circulated beforehand

Asides, whether spoken or written, are not helpful in online meetings for worship for business - please avoid them. They are not good discipline anyway!

Having lots of people say “hope so” can be unhelpful: when asked if the minute is acceptable, once one Friend has said “hope so” then only speak if you disagree.

Ask yourself, is the minute good enough? Does it contain the correct decision? Don’t worry about the grammar.

As clerks are advised in *Quaker faith & practice* 3.19:

Keep a sense of proportion and a sense of humour. Be sensitive to the tempo of the meeting. Do not be over-brisk nor allow matters to drag tediously. Be alert to those who may need encouragement to speak.

# Further information 03 April 2020

General advice at this time

Britain Yearly Meeting: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/coronavirus-advice-for-quaker-meetings>

Woodbrooke: <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/about/online-mfw/Online-worship-advice>

Online Quaker business meetings

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/telephone-conferencing-092012>

<https://quakeremily.wordpress.com/2019/08/23/virtual-clerking/>

Online Meetings for Worship

Online meeting for worship: [www.woodbrooke.org.uk/about/online-mfw/](http://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/about/online-mfw/)

Trustees

Guidance for Area Meeting trustees: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-roles/trustees>

# Questions and comments 03 April 2020

If you have further questions, or have tips to share on the right holding of online meetings for worship for business, please send them to supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk. This email addressis monitored and emails are passed to the most appropriate staff member for a response.

*Recording Clerk’s Office, Quaker Life and Woodbrooke, 27 October 2020*