

# Young Friends General Meeting

26 - 29 May 2023

Bristol

## Minutes

### Those Present (45):

Alexandra Boliver-Brown, Anna Goulding, Anne Seilly, Anya Nanning Ramamurthy, Becky Shirley, Becky Cutts, Bel Ingham, Calum Freeman, Ceridwen Jenkins, Chloe Scaling, Dan Dickinson, Dominic Rawlinson, Eliza Martin, Freya Blyth, Gray Wood, Gus Moore, Hannah Stranex, Izzy Hepburn, Jacob Webb, Jasmin Higgs, Jennie Atherton, Jenny Baines, Jenny Weld, Kate Bernstock, Kim Edwards, Leilani Rabemananjara, Limes Brighton, Lucy Cox Dodgson, Maë Punter, Mikolaj Halber, Morgan Avery Gasson, June Peyton Lee, Rachael Booth, Rosie Gilbert, Rowena Bashforth, Rowan Queerly, Samuel Gilbert, Sam Cooper, Sasha King-Smith, Tanwen McIntyre, Tas Cooper, Tim Rouse, Tim Hall Farthing, Will Reed, William Spooner

Co-Clerks:	Tim Rouse, Hannah Stranex
Trustees:	Gray Wood, Leilani Rabemananjara, Georgia Campbell, Bel Ingham, Sammy Gilbert
Area & Local Meeting Representatives	Hannah Stranex - Surrey and Hampshire Borders Will Reed - York Area Meeting Anne Seilly - Luton and Leighton Area Meeting Maë Punter - Jesus Lane Friends Meeting Gray Wood - Hampshire and Isle of Wight Alexandra Boliver-Brown - East Kent Anna Goulding - Bristol James King - Aberystwyth June Peyton Lee - North East Thames Area Meeting

## 2023.05.01 Membership

In December 2022, Britain Yearly Meeting's Meeting for Sufferings issued a call for discernment, asking its members and their associated meetings to consider four questions regarding membership:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

YFGM has engaged with these questions through a series of Special Interest Groups at our recent gatherings. Within YFGM, we do not practise membership in the same way that Area Meetings do; ours is a simple consequence of attending YFGM's events. Although 'membership' for us is primarily administrative, rather than a public and personal commitment to the community, many YFGMers come to have a powerful sense of belonging. Traditional membership structures can present practical barriers to many younger Friends, and we feel that these difficulties need to be considered in the wider discussion around membership.

Our Special Interest Groups have had wide-ranging conversations but were not led to bring forward specific answers to the questions posed. There are many experiences of belonging among our membership and our discussions reflected the passion that many of us feel.

We are aware of our ability as YFGM to bring a unique perspective, reflecting both the perspective of our age range and our different existing approach. We are grateful for the consultation and look forward to engaging with ongoing discussions of this topic within the wider Yearly Meeting.

## 2023.05.02 Report from EMES Annual Meeting

We have received a report from Rowan Queerly about their attendance on our behalf at the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held 4-7 May 2023 at Woodbrooke in Birmingham. They valued the opportunity to meet Friends from across the Section, to hear the diversity of views on many topics, and to participate in shared worship with Friends in Ukraine.

They found the experience mind-opening as the Annual Meeting was challenged by conflicting attitudes to the war in Ukraine. They heard of work to support refugees and

to bear witness to the war in the present, but noted a lack of discussion of peace-building efforts. They acknowledged that it can be a dangerous and difficult discussion to have.

### 2023.05.03 Testimony and Gathering regarding the life of our Friend Naomi Haigh

We have heard from our Elders, Jenny Baines and Kim Edwards, about taking forward our remembrance and celebration of the life of our Friend Naomi, who died in September 2021.

Part of our minute 2021.10.6 reads *“YFGM had a significant impact on Naomi, and she had a significant impact on us. If there is to be a record of this significance, then we are well placed to create it.*

*There is no rush; there are ways to honour the memory and the Light in Naomi’s life right, and they may take time. It might involve being outdoors, by a lake; it might involve music; we don’t yet know.”*

We have heard a proposal to take forward the organisation of a way to remember and celebrate Naomi appropriately, by naming key contacts to work out exactly what this would look like, and to coordinate others who are willing to help.

We currently expect that this would take the form of a gathering, held some time in the next eighteen months. We anticipate that it would bring together both current YFGMers, and former YFGMers who knew Naomi. We expect to subsidise any such event, seeing this work as a continuation of our ministry and business.

Our love for Naomi is felt deeply throughout the meeting, by those who knew her and those who didn’t, and we are keen that those who attend a gathering can be themselves, without feeling burdened by current roles, so that we may share in carrying the gift of her life and the weight of her loss. We are aware that it may be necessary to make co-options to the Elder and Pastoral committees for any such event.

On Monday, we will consider the financial details of this further, and expect to name two to four key contacts and entrust them with working out the full details.

#### 2023.05.04 Report of Trustees

We have received a report from Tim Hall Farthing about the work of Trustees since our last meeting. At our last gathering, we approved reforms to the trustee role which have reduced the number of trustees and focused their responsibilities, and established the Switchboard committee.

Tim spoke of trustees' work to put in place administrative support arrangements for YFGM through Mindful Business Services (MBS), in line with our approved budget, and the establishment of a new PayPal account for YFGM.

Tim also reported a lapse in the implementation of our Data Protection Policy, as data protection forms were not being completed by all new roleholders. Tim confirmed that trustees did not consider that any reportable data breach took place and that the issue has now been rectified, and should be prevented in future as MBS takes on additional responsibilities around our onboarding of new role holders.

#### 2023.05.05 Planning Weekends

Leilani Rabemananjara, one of our trustees, told us about Planning Weekends, our gatherings held 6-8 weeks before each YFGM to plan our General Meetings.

She explained the general practice of Planning Weekends and their importance in setting our agenda, facilitating meetings between committee members and enabling inter-committee communication, along with valuable social interaction. They emphasised that any YFGMer is welcome at Planning Weekends, and that expenses are paid for relevant role-holders to attend, with bursary funding also available.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, all Planning Weekends were held in person; since then, we held one in-person Planning Weekend in 2022 and budgeted for two in 2023.

We have now held two in-person Planning Weekends in 2023, and the meeting was invited to consider whether our September Planning Weekend should be in-person, as well as to decide what our general approach to Planning Weekends should be.

Leilani and others spoke to us of the strengths of in-person events, including the joy of conversations that reinforce to us that these are human beings you're interacting with and you can actually be friends together in a community; of building strong connections with one another, sharing community, and play, and joyfulness together. We heard of the opportunity to forge links with Local Meetings around the country, as

well as of the barriers to accessibility and energy that are posed by the travel and logistical organising required for an in-person event.

We also noted that Planning Weekends have an associated financial cost, with YFGM currently budgeting (generously) £1,900 for each Planning Weekend, including necessary travel costs.

We have been reminded that an in-person Planning Weekend is a good weekend, and that having in-person events has been an easy choice for the two so far this year. We agree that our September Planning Weekend should take place in-person, from 8-10 September, and ask Switchboard to find and publicise a venue for this weekend, with support from other committees and MBS as needed.

We rejoice in the sense of constant community that comes from our regular meetings, including Planning Weekends, and in the broiling and bubbling conversations that can arise and take shape into the things we will be quaking about for years to come.

While we acknowledge that there are complications involved in their implementation, the boost of energy provided by the love we give to one another when meeting in-person is worth our extra time and cost.

We expect to return to mostly holding in-person Planning Weekends, being aware that the option of online gatherings will remain open to us. We ask trustees and the finance committee to review our policies around paying for travel expenses and how these are communicated, while being mindful of the need for new voices to be heard and welcomed into the vital process of facilitating this community.

### 2023.05.06 [Report from Switchboard](#)

Jenny Baines gave a report from our newest committee, Switchboard, which was established in February. This committee comprises representatives from other committees and takes on other responsibilities as in our minute 2023.02.04.

Jenny spoke of the unsteady process of establishing and implementing a new and unusual committee, but it seems to us that surer footing is being found.

We will continue to uphold members of Switchboard as they establish ways of working, including with MBS.

### 2023.05.07 Minute of EMEYF

We have received a minute from the Spring Gathering of European and Middle Eastern Young Friends (EMEYF), which took place in April in Congeniés, France. EMEYF brings together young Friends from across the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section.

EMEYF is seeking to appoint a UK Treasurer, with responsibility for managing their UK bank account and being a trustee of EMEYF. The Friend appointed needs to have a UK address. We receive their minute and will publicise the role to our members. Anybody interested should speak in the first instance to Jacob Webb.

### 2023.05.08 Britain Yearly Meeting Agenda

We have heard from Rachael Booth about the planning process regarding the agenda for Britain Yearly Meeting. YFGM has been invited to send a representative to Yearly Meeting Agenda Committees' next meeting in September. We receive this invitation and will hold a Special Interest Group later today to consider what we might wish to bring to the attention of the Agenda Committee.

### 2023.05.09 Loyal address to Charles Mountbatten-Windsor

Our minute 2023.02.06 on 'the king thing' was sent to Meeting for Sufferings, which will be considering it, alongside the text of the loyal address which was delivered to Charles on 9 March, on the 1 July as part of a Meeting for Sufferings session which is open to all. Friends are invited to attend this session online or in-person.

### 2023.05.10 Nominations Returns

We appoint the Friends named in the below table to the roles specified. We release Friends as indicated in the table and thank all those named below for their service.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Released</b>	<b>Appointed</b>	<b>Until</b>
Pastoral	<i>Vacancy brought forward</i>	Eliza Martin	May 2026
Elder	<i>Vacancy brought forward</i>	Sasha Lawson-Frost	May 2026

Planning Weekend Newcomer	Maë Punter Georgia Martin	Morgan Gasson Mikolaj Halber Dominic Rawlinson	October 2023
Trustee	Jenny Herbert Tim Hall Farthing	Bel Ingham	October 2026
Fundraiser	Romy Neale Guasch	June Peyton Lee	May 2026
Media Officer	Leilani Rabemananjara	Sasha King Smith	May 2026

### 2023.05.11 Special Interest Groups

Special interest groups this weekend were:

- Discussing our approach to racism - Hannah Stranex
- Discussing our approach to transphobia - Hannah Stranex
- YFGM Tea Club - Tim Hall Farthing
- Bringing back YFGM on the road (sharing our processes with Local Meetings) - Tim Hall Farthing
- What do we want to see on the Yearly Meeting agenda? - Rachael Booth
- Dance - Rowan Queerly
- Intro to British Sign Language - Will Reed
- Feminist Gospels: Mary Magdalene - Jennie Atherton
- Designing YFGM Tea-towels - Becky Shirley

We thank those who facilitated Special Interest Groups, and encourage anyone who would like to run a SIG at a future YFGM to speak to the Logistics committee.

### 2023.05.12 Testimony and Gathering

Further to minute 2023.05.03, we have checked with our finance committee about available resources to support this activity. We expect to subsidise this event by up to £1,000, in the expectation that if further expenditure is required the amount can be amended as necessary by our Finance Committee. We name Jenny Baines, Jennie Atherton and Hannah Stranex as primary contacts for the organisation of this event, and encourage others who are interested in supporting the planning work or in participating to speak to these Friends.

2023.05.13 [Our next gathering](#)

We hope to gather again for our next YFGM which will take place from 20-22 October at Lancaster Meeting House.

2023.05.14 [Clerks' Offering](#)

In worship, we peel ourselves open, we share our segments, we are beautifully, painfully, reminded that we exist. We are filled with light.

Questioning ourselves, being aware of our vulnerability and our limits, is a kind of strength we must value and must nourish. How can we make ourselves better? How can we share our light with others? How do we want to spend this precious time together? It can be fraught, and tiring, to answer questions honestly. We spend a lot of time seeking truth and speaking truth and being true to ourselves in a way that is very vulnerable and can be quite scary.

It can physically and emotionally hurt to be here, sleeping on the floor and sitting in oddly uncomfortable meeting house chairs, wherever we go. It can be painful to emotionally bare yourself in the way that this community requires, but we keep coming back because it's worth it.

It doesn't hurt because of the way we live *here* but because of the way we have to live when we're not here. We spend a lot of time living in a world that is openly hostile to the way we are; coming here we strip away our protective calluses and expose the tender flesh beneath. It doesn't hurt bad, it hurts fresh.

We are aware of our power, and of the responsibility that comes with it to act, in faith, that we can build a better world. We have a sense of growing confidence in ourselves as a community, built upon our willingness to ask ourselves the tough questions, and being aware that we will always have to ask those, to continue to challenge ourselves. Can we take forward that confidence in asking questions of our wider Quaker communities, and the world beyond?

Being here is late nights, and sharing meals, and watching bubbles dance on air currents; it is the rapturous joy of singing together. It is giggling uncontrollably, unsure if we're funny or if we're just sleep deprived.

We love you. We're glad you exist.

Signed, in and on behalf of Young Friends General Meeting,  
Hannah Stranex & Tim Rouse  
Co-clerks



## Appendices & Further Information

### Appendix A: Planning Weekends Briefing

#### **What Planning Weekend is:**

*Part of minute 2022.10.09:*

Ahead of each gathering we hold a Planning Weekend, to thresh the agenda for the coming YFGM and to think about the future. Agenda items come out of suggestions and ideas from the community; an idea might become a SIG which then becomes a business item, and from there becomes an event, a project, or, well, God knows what. Our next Planning Weekend will be from 13-15 January 2023, and we plan to hold this as an in-person event, as we did before the Covid-19 pandemic. All are welcome to attend Planning Weekend, and travel expenses will be paid for those whose roles require them to attend.

#### **Historical context:**

**Before the pandemic**, we held three in-person Planning Weekends each year, about six to eight weeks before each YFGM.

As well as setting the agenda, Planning Weekends provide space for committees to have face-to-face meetings, and for people to socialise and have useful conversations between people on different committees.

**During the pandemic**, we held online-only Planning Weekends. Committees also started to meet increasingly online, reducing the need for an in-person gathering, although the effectiveness of this varies a lot.

#### **'After' we started having in-person YFGMs again:**

In October 2021 we set out budget for 2022 on the basis of minute 2021.10.04:

*Last year, there was a reduction of costs due to the covid pandemic, so this current budget is based on the last full year of three in-person gatherings each year and a planning weekend for each gathering. This budget assumes one in-person planning weekend each January, with the other two planning weekends being held online via Zoom.*

In October 2022 we set our budget for 2023 on the basis of having two in-person planning weekends in 2023.

## **In 2023**

We held in-person Planning Weekends in January and April 2023.

### **We need to decide:**

- 1) **Should our September Planning Weekend, ahead of our October YFGM, be held in-person or online?**
  - Being online reduces travel costs
  - But you don't get face-to-face meetings and social times
- 2) **What should our general approach to Planning Weekends in future be? Do we expect to do mostly in-person PWs, or to mix, and go back and forth?**

In October 2022 we held a SIG talking about how to reform our Trustees. This led into the business this February where we set up the Switchboard committee.

In that SIG, the following proposal for Planning Weekends was drafted, but this **did not** make it explicitly into the Trustee Reform that we adopted; we simply said in that business that Trustee responsibilities include "Running an annual Strategy Day for both Trustees and Switchboard."

### **Part of notes from SIG on trustee reform**

The format and nature of Planning Weekend was also discussed. In-person Planning Weekends are valuable not only for putting together an agenda for the next YFGM, but also for communication between committees, and for decisions that need wider input but don't need to go to a business meeting.

However, three full Planning Weekends a year is a lot of weekends to commit to, and we have seen from experience that threshing and setting an agenda can be done in a day at an online Planning Weekend.

Pre-Covid, Trustees also had one Strategy Weekend a year, as a face-to-face meeting. We discussed bringing this back as a wider event, which anyone could attend.

The proposal was to have:

- One big in-person Planning Weekend each year, probably in January, which most people on committees would attend. This would be a venue for committee meetings as well as whole-group threshing and decision-making.
- Two online Planning Days each year, tasked with threshing and agenda setting for the upcoming YFGM.
- One in-person Strategy Weekend each year, for committee meetings and discussions, especially forward-looking ones.