

OUR FUTURE

This discussion paper is the first of a series which expands on information provided to members about discussions to amalgamate the Queensland Family History Society (QFHS) and the Genealogical Society of Queensland (GSQ).

Your comments or questions are welcomed – please email them to either

QFHS: ourfuture@qfhs.org.au or GSQ: ourfuture@gsq.org.au

or mail them to either Society's postal address.

AMALGAMATION OF QFHS AND GSQ

Concern for the ongoing survival of your Society in today's world of falling society memberships and easy online access to records has prompted your Management Committee to seek to find a pathway to a sustainable family history and genealogy organisation for Queensland.

The Management Committees of GSQ and QFHS are in early, but active, discussions regarding possible amalgamation of both Societies, as equal partners, into one organisation, with its resource centre within 8 km of the centre of Brisbane.

THE SITUATION AT PRESENT

Hard realities to be faced include -

- Our need for new premises with greater security of tenure and affordable rental
- Our inability, as two separate organisations, to effectively engage with government agencies to seek assistance
- The ageing profile of our membership – we need more members and we need younger members
- Potential new members' expectation of us to provide online resources, services and education via remote access

ACCOMMODATION

Both Societies face insecurity of tenure over their resource centre accommodation. QFHS must relocate to new premises in the next few years. GSQ likewise could be facing relocation sooner rather than later.

Without the security of a long-term lease at reasonable rates, each Society faces having to fund regular costs of relocation.

Presently the Societies are jointly exploring accommodation options. But in approaching government agencies about plans for such locations, the stronger voice and standing of a single Queensland family history organisation would stand a greater chance of recognition and success.

MEMBERSHIP AND RESOURCES

Both Societies have static or declining growth in membership. This has been noticed since the introduction of Ancestry.com in 2006.

Long-standing active volunteers are retiring or markedly reducing their involvement in their Society, with fewer coming forward to replace them. The volunteer cohort is ageing.

Membership is critical as it drives both financial health and the capacity to source volunteers to manage the Societies and their activities.

Rightly or wrongly, people have an expectation that material will be found on-line, largely due to the accessibility of information on the Internet. While our Societies have a key role in ensuring access to the valuable resources that are, and will always be, offline, the importance of remote access for attracting and retaining members cannot be denied.

BENEFITS OF AMALGAMATION

MORE EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The creation of a single flagship organisation as a centre of excellence for Queensland family history and genealogy would enhance the provision of family history research needs and the interests of its members and of the wider Queensland community.

The organisation would be far more effective in promoting its contribution to Queensland's social and economic welfare to Government and other agencies, giving access to better fundraising capabilities, stronger relationships with Government agencies, and broader awareness by potential members.

IMPROVED ABILITY TO ACHIEVE KEY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

There would be an increased capacity for generating income due to the improved relationships with stakeholders to access grants, broader membership base, and access to a wider range of skills to more effectively promote the organisation.

There would be an enhanced ability to attract new and retain existing members due to the improved service offerings.

The ability to provide online and remote access would be enhanced due to the broader skill base of volunteers and combination of IT capacity.

A BROADER POOL OF SERVICES, EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

While both Societies provide many similar services, each Society provides a range of services unique to that Society. An amalgamated organisation would provide a wider range of offerings to its members by collaboration, unification and enrichment of current services and activities.

Members would have access to a wider pool of expertise and experience, simply by combining the two memberships.

There would be more special interest groups available to the members, with some combined and some newly available to the greater membership.

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE IMPROVEMENTS

There would be efficiencies of scale in delivery of services such as research, production of publications, buddy programs, and the education program.

There would be access to a wider pool of potential volunteers and their skills and experience.

A single premises would provide for a reduced outlay on rent, electricity, etc.

Those who are presently members of both Societies would pay only one membership.

MAINTENANCE OF STATUS QUO

Both Societies are Incorporated Associations under Queensland legislation. They have the same main aims and, in the main, deal with the same type of physical print and electronic assets.

Members would continue to receive the same benefits for their class of membership. This includes Ordinary, Family or Dual, Life, or Honorary Life memberships.

IMPEDIMENTS TO AMALGAMATION

EXPENSE

Amalgamating the two Societies would involve one-off financial and human resource costs. These include:

- Preparing and managing the process of the amalgamation, including legal advice.
- Creating and delivering member communications to keep everyone informed.
- Expense and time to move premises (QFHS must do this anyway)
- Time spent rationalising and re-cataloguing resources and services

CHANGES

Blending two societies into a single organisation would entail some changes. Routines may be upset or changed and planned activities and usual behaviours may be interrupted. Time, effective communication, and understanding intended outcomes (the bigger picture in terms of long-term survival) would be needed to learn the new ways.

CHANGE OF NAME

A new name and logo would be required for the organisation.

There would be a single new journal, website, eNews/Snippets, social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, blogs et al) and so on.

FINANCES

Each Society would have a different financial input to the new body.

At present QFHS's financial assets are greater than those of GSQ. However, the reserved funds of QFHS are for costs associated with securing and shifting to new premises. QFHS will need to spend this whether amalgamation proceeds or not.

PROCESS

The Queensland *Associations Incorporation Act 1981*, under which both Societies are incorporated, provides a process for two incorporated associations to combine to create a single incorporated association.

The assets and liabilities of the previous Societies become the assets and liabilities of the new Society. There is no need to wind up the previous Societies, they simply amalgamate into the new organisation.

NEXT STEPS

Amalgamation is not yet agreed. There are important steps to be taken to determine whether or not it is the best way forward.

Preliminary discussions have centred on broad reasons why the amalgamation may or may not occur.

The next steps include obtaining cost estimates, evaluating member impacts, conducting financial analysis of operating costs and comparing those of the individual Societies with estimated costs of the new organisation.

Your Management Committee remains committed to working for a sustainable Society in these changing times.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Your input is welcomed. You are invited to provide any questions or comments by emailing either

QFHS: ourfuture@qfhs.org.au or GSQ: ourfuture@gsq.org.au

If you prefer not to email, you can post your feedback to either Society at the usual postal address, marked "Our Future".

Thank you for your interest.

Bev Young

President
QFHS

Jan Bimrose

Vice President
GSQ