



May Queen Big Blether

21.5.17 - 45 in attendance

Key:
MQ – May Queen
ME – Mother Earth
GM – Green Man

Thank you to those who came along and took part in the Blether! These big conversations are aimed at getting a sense of the community's views on certain topics, and finding out what, if any, actions BFS needs to consider to make sure we still meet the community's needs and ideals or to examine particular topics and how we deal with them. These talks are not binding, in terms of actions, but are strongly advisory. If you'd like to contribute your own feelings to these or other Blether notes, then please email board@beltane.org at any time.

Tom W: Brief introduction and welcome to the Blether, reiterates that it is to talk about the role of the May Queen and associated topics.

A Big Blether is a chance for the BFS community to come together, have a discussion and make advisory comments which will help the society work out what the mind-set of the community is.

Sometimes we have Blethers because things have gone wrong, sometimes it's because we've not had a chance to think about things for a while. This time, Anna, our current May Queen, has given us the opportunity to think about something we've not talked about as a community for a long time.

Tom outlined the topics (as below) and the rules – one hand up to make a point, two if you wish to address the current comment directly, and 'jazz hands' for agreement with a statement.

TOPIC 1 - '*Ruling over Hippydom*': What is the role of the May Queen?

Fenland: Traditionally, I feel the May Queen (MQ) is the figurehead and focus around which most of us have operated. She embodies the characteristics by which we define our groups and ourselves. Her role is to be one of the main focusses of what we, BFS, define ourselves as.

Rob (Blue): Keystone figure in everything that we do. In the early days, there was the infamous meeting where creators decided what were the core parts of festival and where freedoms were around that. MQ was in the centre of that as a keystone figure. BFS has agreed implicitly or tacitly that whatever else has gone on: the procession, acropolis, death and rebirth, bonfire, bower are all essential parts. So, the MQs journey is held as sacred to the ritual we're creating. Therefore, the person who is the MQ has a lot of responsibility. She is the least free person on the hill as there are a lot of expectations on her.

Anna (MQ): What happens for the MQ, storywise, spiritual wise is the bit which is least changed year to year. What does the actual person do? What is their role? I am the sixth MQ and what the person does, their ability to change the story, has changed greatly over the years. Previously, the

MQ was able to call a lot more of the shots. This has changed and GOs and Court work closely together now on story. Now the MQ is tasked with holding the space for the things which have stayed the same, whilst other things go on around her.

Tom W: We would like to keep apart the role of the person themselves and the role of the character on the hill / walkrounds. Think about what expectations you have of the MQ? Think about your interactions with the MQ and how you might interpret those things as expectations. Think: if I was in that role, would I find that expectation horrendous? These are the things we're trying to get out of this meeting. Some of these things will be good and some bad.

Josh (Blue): Good to hear people's memories about what has been valuable on the night for people.

Ire: For me the big thing is about inspiring people. Both GM and MQ inspire people. My expectations don't come from the spiritual aspect of the MQ. I feel that one of the expectations would be her presence, during the run up and whilst doing your own things, providing the sort of mythical glow. She works as a magnet and helps the groups come together. One of the pressures on her is having to be present while their own journeys are happening. Have to be there for everyone, but a lonely position.

Fenland: The first few years I was involved, as a participant and even as a GO, we didn't see much of the MQ because of having other focuses. It's become the case that with the blues being the law keepers, the MQ has been an embodiment of that. As the May Queen is a constant presence as one person, this brings an aspect of being able to physically relate to someone as a person with history in the Society.

I can understand that there is a pressure for the MQ to be this constant person. Even if the blues change, the MQ doesn't. She is a figurehead. When you can say 'this is the person who has been the MQ for this length of time' it gives people who are new a sense of physical continuity. It could be that there is a pressure for the MQ to be always there, present and that can be an isolating position.

As for support – they (Court) are the people who give us (groups) the connection but does that work in reverse? How can we better support the MQ? If the MQ changes regularly does that reinforce or remove the constancy?

Nick: Constancy was raised as a point – I think that it's something we very much need in the role of the MQ, Blues, GM, Reds. The nature of the GM role is to explicitly represent change. Death, rebirth and a sharp chop from one year to another. The MQ, notionally, is the same MQ as forever. No one can do that in reality: five years is amazing. The role is very constrained, and has a lot of expectations with it. As a society, having that constancy creates a sense of comfort in a world where things are changing all the time. Comforting to participate in a story as if it were true. Having the MQ from year to year who is much the same in what she does year to year is an excellent foil to the changing nature of other groups. For example, Faerie porters are impossible unless you can guarantee the MQ, Cail, etc. will exist for them to play on. Explicitly standard.

There are other groups who are more tightly constrained but still depend on a central point which doesn't move much. Therefore that's partly about the role on the night – literally doing the same thing as previous years, but also in the run-up where some things are always in place before trying to fit other things around that role. If everything was up for grabs we'd never get things together.

If you're a person who likes to have a lot of creative control you'd not get on well in this role, necessarily.

Robin C: The MQ represents and is an embodiment of the impetus and will. The prime mover, the thing that causes the whole thing to happen. As such, even more than the GM, she's someone in a position to have her interaction with other groups be the defining or moment of impetus for their stories on the hill. As such I think one of the most important parts of the role is for her to be available to take that part in all of the other stories. The balance between the continuity of her story and the availability to intertwine that with others' stories is important.

Jen H: Thoughts about how she's different to the GM. Probably something to do with who has held those roles. I tend to feel more of a connection to GM and that he seems to visit more groups. Never gotten that sense from all MQs. Anna was slightly different in this regard. Would it be better for everyone to have time with MQ to feel connection – or is it better to have the GM role being to connect w/ groups throughout and MQ being a role for one the night.

Tom: May Queen / Mother Earth – everyone in our society should be getting back to connecting with nature. Whilst there is some of this with the GM, our relation with the MQ and ME should be much the same. The person in that role should be spending as much time as possible with the groups. There's a lot of time pressure – costume, practice, etc. However, the more interaction there is between the MQ and groups, the stronger the groups will be. That ability to disconnect from modernity is something people value.

Raini: The role of the MQ for me is to facilitate the connection between community and ME. It is very hard as one person to embody that connection. Over the time I've been in Beltane there's been a lot of new people coming in and that role is central to helping them understand what the community is about. People are not necessarily attracted to the community at first for the connections to ME, elements etc. but are drawn because of community itself. It's the MQ's role to bring people from that point to being able to engage with things you may not connect with in day to day life.

This is difficult because MQ is one person, even if the blues and others help. It is nice if you get connections with the MQ during the runup and get some insight into MQs character. Is it for the MQ to do all of this or is it for others to help?

(Room agrees)

Duncan: Talking about expectations – for me the MQ is a figure to be worshipped. Most of our great works of architecture are made to give people a thing to look up to. This is one of the main roles of the MQ at Beltane.

Vix: What was sit like first year vs. subsequent years? Did it get easier?

Anna (MQ): Yes! The previous MQ left the continent really quickly and it was all very sudden, terrifying. It's about growing into the role. Previously, when someone was picked, it was understood that that person would do at least 3 years and that they would have been in the society a good few years and knew a good bit about what is expected.

It got easier for me to learn how I carried the expectations people had and talk about what the MQ does with the community. I found that this happened in two ways – the first is incredibly connective. 300 people holding their own strong personal ideas of what the MQ is and you have to hold that space for them and own that and that is the ME side, keeping the fundamentals there and let people carry that in their own way. The second thing is that I tried to come in with the sole notion of giving a sense of what the purpose of the MQ is. The Open Meetings are often about trying to split between 'we are real people and friends' balanced with the ME stuff. We make a fire, we

make a circle, we've been doing that for a long time. Let's remember it as a community, not just as 'my own thing'. That got easier, just knowing what the core purpose is makes things much easier.

As for holding a space for people to say what they are to you: I might not connect with that particular vision – that is an art but doesn't necessarily get easier. Someone in front of you telling you what they want you to be. One is about being engaged, the other is about being reflective.

Claire: In terms of pressures – she is an impartial figure, the MQ is facilitating everyone else's Beltane. The Blues have a similar role but get involved in discussions. That may be quite hard if a group was to do a thing the MQ doesn't personally connect to. The MQ should, I feel, be above disagreements. We like to have the Queen and Goddess as a figurehead.... But we don't like to be ruled! Other court figures don't have quite that much pressure of 'don't get involved'. May Queen more restricted because of continuous agreement – people feel she's pushing her feels if she tries to change things.

Anna (MQ): I'll piggyback on that. Anna can't say 'I want to light the Bonfire' – or 'I don't want to do the stage or the Acropolis sequence' as it's owned by the other groups in part and they can't ask to change that either. They are owned by the society. So the MQ is impartial because, actually, she is everybody's. That has changed – the original MQ was much more involved.

Alun: What the MQ expects and what people get from it. Everyone is trying to connect with all aspects. No one person can embody the perfect mix of the sheer number of ways people connect with whatever it is we do.

Sara F: For me the role of MQ would be a balance between a role of respect and appreciation. Sometimes we all get caught up in our own narrative and forget to appreciate and respect the person holding it together in the middle, providing that link to ME. I'd see it ideally as the relationship we'd like to have with ME – to take but to give back.

Sometimes we forget how that balance is not addressed – we tend to give too much or take too much and complain, then, that it is not reciprocated how we'd like. 400 hearts and intentions are hard to deal with. It's about understanding that one person holds all of that but they are only one person. Moving on from how we see that role – how do we support that role in a way that's fair for both that person and everyone else and how they all will connect with the MQ.

Robin J: On the theme of expectation – personally I've not had any connection with the MQ and that's not the fault of any one person. I was a GO in 2013, and the first question asked was: how do you relate to the story and the Cailleach?, and I feel like in the last few years, whether it's the particular groups or society, but there's no pressure to keep that connection. GOs I've had haven't really talked about that connection. In Red you talk about connecting with the masculine and red energy. The expectations of keeping the MQ as a figure to revere – but there's an onus on the GOs to keep that bond together.

Diana: I'd like to add something and it's delicate, and it's of particular interest to me. For me: any court figure is a potential role model for anyone in the community and anyone on Beltane and Samhuinn night. For me there's a fascinating thing around the notion of the divine masculine and feminine embodied by these figures. Personally I've found that I've come to a point where I feel less connected to these aspects. I've come to prefer qualities of a person or connection. In BFS, lately, younger people are pushing the boundary of what gender and sexual orientation means. I see that as a cutting edge for humanity. I really celebrate it. So then, I am aware that BFS, all through the time I've been involved in it has been a draw for all of the freaks and weirdos (Super room

agreement) and I love that about it and I'm fiercely protective of it, especially looking at the politics going on at the moments.

So then, I'm curious about the figurehead, genuine curiosity, how might one represent the qualities of the MQ without going gender normative with it? All of our MQs have been beautiful women – is there a space for less obviously societally beautiful women – different age, body shape.

In a highly visible position – I think what we present to 10,000 people on the night can be avant-garde.

TOPIC 2 - 'A new May Queen Arises' - How should the May Queen role be selected?

Tom: I think that's a great point to use to change over to the next point. Diana has brought up a few of the things to be covered in this section.

What we're looking for are questions about processes, criteria, thought process, what drives that selection.

Ire: I think it would be really interesting to figure out what we really mean when we say masculine or feminine. Is that just a container for other things – can we strip it back to the essential – what are the real qualities that might help with thinking about the role of MQ?

Tom: We decided at a previous blether that gender would not affect someone being able to be in a particular role. From that, how do we figure out how that statement of intent from that community.

Kate: Whilst we did as a society make that very clear, I think there's still a lot of work to be done *as people* to strip away the gender normative behaviours. We have that ingrained from a young age. Is that what is in people's mind as a feminine character. It raises further issues that need to be worked on.

Jen H: Gender is performative – what shape the MQ is, what shape the GM is, it's not the shape at all of the gender or person inside it. It's a costume representation of something.

Fenland: I just want to clarify – how **has** the MQ been selected in the past? Can we state how it has been done previously?

Rob: It's very similar to when it is time to select new Blues: the current Blues are always looking out at who's coming up, been around a while, shows evidence of 'getting it', and being able to hold that power. There's always a shortlist. When it comes time to choose all of the relevant parties sit and look at this list and talk about who could hold this role, who will be around. Some names then might be taken out because they're not in the position to be able to do it. Usually it then comes down to one or two names and one might be an obvious choice. In all GM, Blue and MQ decisions in the past there's been fluidity of gender involved.

When we've come up with one name that person has been approached and asked if they can take it on. The blues have been given a mandate to take that decision and then requested that the person take that role on and it's up to that person to decide.

Sara: Just clarifying that in the most recent GM / Blues selections it's not just a case that the blues decide but also the community have been invited to suggest names. Including self-nomination.

Tom: On the role of the board... the last couple of festivals we've been trying to find a balance. There's been two board members at the selection of the last few. Panel has consisted of Blues and former MQ in the past. The role of the board is to help with making sure it's that the process which occurs is as fair as possible.

Josh: In response to Ire's point. What is the femininity and masculinity represented? Going back to the earliest festival - at the centre you have the fire and it represents all of the things – the sky and the earth and the fire in the middle. Being a fertility festival, it's about who comes together and make love, and from them springs forth everything. That's why they have been gendered – they are acting out this role. MQ represents the maiden – leading us all between the cycles. Traditionally her look of being covered in flowers is very maidenly. The idea is to represent a woman who is ready to make love. In the same way as the GM strips himself out and makes himself ready. That's why these are the very basics – representing more than just the individuals who are there.

Will: It seems as though, as a society, as a whole, we have a distance to go. We try to be as accepting as possible. But I feel there are some times where we over emphasize this gender thing so as not to cause offense. Where I sit I can see the divine feminine and masculine in everything. We're here to see how the next MQ is selected. Is the gender such a massive issue that we should focus on at this time.

Diana: I just wanted to talk a bit about my selection process as Cailleach. For the process to be opened out and explicitly stated that everyone could apply made it very powerful for me to apply. It may not be for everyone, but it was for me. While I hear what Sara said that there hasn't been an explicit restriction, there's a huge difference between a not-explicit restriction and an active welcome. Was striking to me from knowing others who put themselves forward, I realise how many of us there were who did so. In my mind I could imagine there being someone the blues hadn't yet been able to get to know who may well have everything it took – so then to have the opportunity to fill out a full on form which drew out of me why I felt an affinity with the role of Cailleach was good.

To be openly, actively, welcome to put yourself forward then going through the process, selection, interview, waiting. I don't think there was any loss of magic in any of that. There must be some magic to being approached, and I celebrate that, but for me there was no loss. Also, I knew already that the Cailleach was coming to me and even if I hadn't been chosen I'd have needed to take her elsewhere. That structured selection, even point by point process was magic for me.

Shae: There's been lots of discussion about gender and its relation to the court roles. I like the idea that anyone can apply for the roles. We talked a lot about continuity and this I feel was the important part that all of our members share. This is more central to the role than the gender of the person representing it.

Raini: Other side of Diana's thoughts – as someone who didn't get the role of Cailleach. Having gone through the role of really connecting with the character, and interview and then not being selected is heart breaking. You have to really connect with the character and then may not get to represent them. To go through that as MQ would be really tough on a lot of individuals. We need to have trust in our community, board, elders. We should absolutely give suggestions – but from my own feelings, I think I don't want that. I know that people might feel the blues and board won't notice a person – but if those qualities were really visible they'd come across.

Kate: I sit between these two points. The two questions of having to physically sit down and write answers and go through it all and connect with with character, and looking at how she connects to you and the society. I think that process is incredibly valuable for the people who are going to be in

that role. I'd also agree that going through it and not getting it is a difficult thing. Whether a job interview or a spiritual one – just because you invest so much. I guess I'm saying we need to make sure that people who are being nominated have gone through that process but there maybe needs to be a middle ground because it removes a personal aspect but maybe makes it too sharp edged.

Nick: Raini's not the first person to say that they feel like it's a cliff edge if they don't get it – so much at the prep stage. I don't think that means we shouldn't do that process. What we should do is too make support for everyone who applied. Make some sort of a process which, when one person is selected, the others have to find a way to deal with not being in that role. After-selection support for those who didn't make it, whatever form that takes.

One of the issues that I could flag is timing – if the timing for the selection of the court role, there's no time to recuperate and take on something meatier for that selection we lose people and do those people a disservice. If we even consider giving these people the representation of a key aspect.

(Some room agreement)

Will: I went through an interview process – the interview in itself had the helpful effect of making me understand why it was there. A formal application process cheapens the whole process as there are boxes to tick. You feel her in you, not just answering the right questions. It's holding the space for 250-odd people to be involved in something which, for some people, is divine and sacred.

Josh: Selection procedure, interviews – as Sara was saying, I think it's very important that people can nominate and self-nominate. Even if the roles are seen as gendered that's not seen as a reason to not have someone. I do feel that, for the MQ, because of this issue of continuity, it's a role that I feel everyone should aspire to but it's a role that no one is entitled to and not everyone can be. As for the formal process – you can make a huge list but a lot of it's not tangible – how do they dance, how do they talk to people. As important as their knowledge of the society. What have they developed over years of connecting with the society rather than: they are nominated, given a form, and they might have all of the qualities but there's that intangible thing that is necessary for any court role. You also look for someone who has brought searching to the role.

Tom: I'd like to explain some of the rationale for last years' change. It was partly because, historically, the male characters had been an application process but the female characters were picked. We'd wanted to equalise those two things and that was the feeling of the community. I'd like to see something which balanced both systems – where people can say they'd like to be considered or definitely can't be considered this year. The board have so little time and have approached a person from the shortlist and that person turns out they weren't available. There can be some consideration for people who want to apply and Blues should maybe speak / spend time with people they don't know well. I was on the panel for the Cailleach interviews and some were very much like job interviews and some were not. This added to time pressures as it took a lot to make the final decision.

John: Time for MQs has come down and that's good – maybe blues don't know people well, it allows for people to have a chance to be around and in a few years' time to have that chance to be picked if they weren't there

Interviews are a good thing. I didn't get it – it made me think about why I didn't get it. It gave me thinking time, things to consider for next time.

Duncan: We need to be aware that it's a great weight to face the people and make this decision – need to be aware that someone is taking on the burden of choosing. You can know if you make a good or bad decision but not if you make the best one.

Anna: The question of selection isn't about the MQ lifecycle. People thought I was too young. Visible qualities are really important – an application is not enough. Someone who's known and has emerged as part of it, it does become a bit of a natural selection. There's a thing about the MQ is about no ego. People saw how I engaged with my group and demonstrated those physical things. The next MQ, I think, has to be someone who will be known. If we don't know that person, I think that speaks of itself that it's not that person's time. It should be someone who's potential has been seen.

Claire: Nominations, application forms, interviews. The MQ is a different role from the others – what is appropriate for Cailleach may not be for the MQ. For me I'd like to see greater emphasis on the nominations process. Not like an election, but almost really strongly encourage people to nominate others – maybe that would allow the Blues and Board to come up with a shortlist – if one person is nominated a lot, and you have a shortlist of a couple, then that person stands out. Application forms are the wrong way to go with the MQ as she doesn't have a lot of creative direction – the other roles are going to have that and thus it benefits them to have to go through that process. Maybe not just choosing one from nominations – but interviewing two or three people. This minimises the number of people affected by interviews. I feel like if there was a nominations process, with, say, three people invited to interview with less notice, there'd be enough time to think about it but not enough to be heartbroken.

Diana: In the past in BFS the MQ and Cailleach role was the same person who kept that role and did both for a few years. It's of interest to me – what might it be like if the Cailleach held the role for a few years. Personally I'd like to engage with it a bit longer. How would it feel for a MQ to go into the Cailleach role?

Will: Following on from Claire and Diana. I don't agree that the MQ should do the Cailleach role but that she should do it when she ends her journey. Couldn't agree with Claire more – the Kings and Cailleach go through that process, and have some creative control. We get to envision our ideas for that role but the MQ doesn't. She has a role but she is always: destination A to B. The GM has more freedom. Her role is completely different from those roles. She holds space for the GM, guides him. This needs to be taken into consideration. She has to be someone who is capable of being a guiding light for those who may never have done the festival before - that's certainly my feeling.

Elsbeth: Very much learning about the festival, it's my first year. Application process – too much ticking boxes – are there any practical exercises? Chance to embody those qualities?

Will: I was asked for a bit more info, but I don't think you can step into it. It's already in there, it develops and grows inside you.

Elsbeth: Regarding the heartbreak about not getting the role – is there space within the festival which looks at grief and Hel and a space to deal with those feelings?

Tom: There have been groups like that, but it relies on people putting those ideas forward. We can't guarantee that. The creative process depends on the community and if no one does then how do we find space for that? If you were in that role, would you necessarily want to be in a prominent grieving role?

Ire: There's some complexities. We would like, sometimes, the people who don't get the roles for people to be able to GO but logistics means it sometimes can't happen. I take the point that a space is needed. Shortlisting is valuable, if controversial. The burden of having to choose – as a blue something may not manifest to you but may to others. It's a role that I wouldn't want to take. Respect that sorting out what appears to you and a community is a hard thing to judge. There's a thing about embodying a role and being ready – you need to give people a chance to vocalise if they're ready. You may feel an affinity but that last step of going for it – that comes with risk of not getting it, but could precipitate someone coming into that role fully. Externalising it via the processes can make you realise you weren't sure, and that you might now be.

Josh: Regarding timescales – don't have time to apply for a GO role. I feel that's a good thing. Basically you want someone in that role to be all or nothing, no hedging bets. It's one festival... some people 'need' to GO every festival but, realistically, it's not a huge issue if you don't get to court or GO for one festival.

Claire: Quite aside from the point that someone has gone for a court role can't go on to GO, having court selected before GOs are means people can decide whether they can engage with that person as a GO / Group. Especially certain groups like the Whites or Cailleachan.

Vix: For quite a lot of people there isn't always a next festival – you may be moving away or being ill.

Josh: I hear that. If you really just want to do something, there are so many different roles you can do - GOing is not important.

John: Maybe it's survivor bias – not hedging bets, goes all in... is what you want in the person who gets the role. Beneficial for the person in the role – but for others, that's not what you want as it means that some people end up with nothing, in their all or nothing.

If we're going to ask everyone to put their names in, and end up with far more people than we anticipate then we use up some of the experienced and creative people we need to be GOing the festival to that process. Absolute commitment is a benefit, but the costs to the other positions is perhaps bad.

Will: I disagree with all or nothing – there's an entire festival for them to go do. It's all or something equally as beautiful.

Sara: I hear everything people are saying about time and investment. This feels like there needs to be a place for everyone who puts their name forward for this. GOing is not the only solution. I wonder if instead of discussing the timeline, that court is selected before GOs, we should be focussing on how we support these people. We need to provide that support but need to remember that there are limited time and energy resources. Asking Blues / Board to select everyone and keep the festival going, yes, lets support people, but make it sustainable for everyone involved.

(Room vociferously agrees)

Anna: How do you know what you're applying for if you've never done it? It's not just the current blues who select. Trust that whoever has picked have seen those qualities in that person. They wouldn't know what it was about themselves that made them MQs. They know what is involved and can see that in a person.

Tom: We talked about the role of the deity and that the person in that role doesn't need all of the same skills as a GO. I don't think all court roles are people who would have been great GOs. Time etc. needs to be taken into consideration.

To be clear, Anna wanted to raise the issue of choosing – but are we actually driving a change? There's no agenda to do a change necessarily – and things may not actually change.

TOPIC 3 - 'Hanging up the Head- Dress': The life Cycle of the May Queen

Robin J: Question about not the lifecycle but lifetime. When is the MQ selected – just before a festival or 6 months in advance?

Anna: There's no formula, it just depends on the circumstances.

Robin J: You said your first year was more difficult than subsequent years – The role of the MQ is year round, not just an aspect of Beltane, because it is about the year round community, does it make sense to maybe pre-plan the MQ to give her a substantial run-up?

Fenland: In terms of your experience (Anna), do you feel there is a cycle – that there should be a defined period, as a person who's gone through it and become 'the May Queen' for some people – do you feel there's a necessary period of time to be MQ?

Anna: Two or three years is good – you grow into people and they grow into you. There are two sides - how long the lifecycle should be for the character, and personal. Every other MQ has left because something has happened. For me it's different because Edinburgh is my home. For me having a term would have helped. I've felt I missed being in a group and the role can be incredibly lonely. I've felt I had nowhere to go. I've felt profound loss. For that performer, having that framework, an exit strategy, something to go back to, would have felt really good to me. I felt a little bit in crisis for a while. Where can I go after this?

Fenland: Do you think that it should be a case of, if someone is planning to go for the MQ, there should be a thing in place for the person going for it to have an exit strategy beforehand? There should be an easy strategy for them. So that the MQ is not a start and an end?

Jen: it's like a relationship – where we think as a society that an ended relationship is a failure. If we have a term then the stepping down is less of a feeling of failure but a completion.

Rob: I think there was chat about when we choose the MQ and can we choose them with time to have a run in. It's a really experiential role – there's a lot of aspects you can't be prepared for until you do it. Worth being aware for us all that when we begin with a new MQ it's an investment for the community. The Blues will be much more focussed on her for the subsequent few festivals. The GO community will be affected by this as Blues won't be able to be as present. So we'd ask that person to be around for three, four, five years so that we all garner the benefits of the investment. We're all ploughing our own energies for that person to be the best they can.

On the other end – by making it a set term there's a sense that a MQ might take a time to hit their stride and that to stop then, personally, might feel abrupt. A couple of MQs feel they hit their stride in year 3 or 4. You walk away when you have nothing more to give. It should be for the MQ to decide when they've given what they can. But... could we allow people to do 9 years again? That might be too much?

Diana: I'd also want to know that whoever took on the role, they didn't have to keep doing it. Even if after a year they decided it was too much that there wasn't an obligation to continue.

Rob: We're looking for the 2-3 years minimum, but of course we're all volunteers.

Diana: Leaving, once they stop what then? Do you have an image of what happens if any MQ leaves and they don't know what to do.

Anna: It's about how people receive the MQ. I feel really odd if I join a group. That's all about people's expectations. How do I come back and be a Beastie? How people treat me... it's a two way thing.

Diana: I think you'd have a lot of support if you took a risk to join the beasties.

Shae: It occurred to me, just throwing it out, that when you mentioned first becoming MQ that it took a while, particularly in that that first year. There was a lot of work to take on expectations. Same with it coming to an end. I wondered if there was an opportunity to do something like that. Can the former MQ become something for the next festival? A court type figure but supporting the new May queen the next year, e.g.

Bruce: This was my first ever Beltane, and it was great. I don't know a lot, what I'm gonna say might sound crap. If you impose a limit on a MQ and then they're dropped and someone else comes in. They should maybe take on an advisory role. Take some of the burden off of the Blues. For the MQ and GM, Cailleach, as they step down they could become those advisors and help ease the transition.

Will: Should be no mandatory role (room agrees), a lot of time what happens is that members of court will end up being on hand should they be needed. For example, an ex green man came out of nowhere, and offered me support. Should they feel they want to, they do. (room general agreement) Through Josh's green journey, he and I had a great experience working together.

Anna: Every previous MQ has disappeared!

Nick: I think we can say that we've got it right because this one doesn't want to run off. As long as there isn't an expectation – you've already given everything, if there was an expectation to have to do it then it might be too much.

Raini: Regarding the term issue. This may be a potential solution: have a flexible term. Three to five years e.g. (some room support). It's quite nice to have a MQ with a shorter term as it gives the options to mentor people who might have shown an interest. Our lives often move quite quickly for many people doing BFs and we can't necessarily plan that 'in five years' time I want to do this...' being shorter terms allow for people to have that chance and plan it. (Some room agreement)

Nick: I have a suggestion for a term idea – ask anyone going to do it for at least three, five years is allowed, and checking in for both MQ and community after that if they feel that person should stay. There are then some expectations. What we need from you, what's yours if you want it, and we're open to more but it's up to the community.

>: Seems to me that you found the role really lonely. Would it be easier if the groups were more involved with MQ? I really connected with you when you came to us. Bit easier to have a connection between the role and community.

Fenland: Would it be an idea for if there is a flexible term –if you think you might only want to do one more year, there should be a process triggered to select the next MQ, so that there is a Queen in waiting who could shadow the current MQ and learn? So when MQ is ready to step down, there

is another person ready who's ready to be able to take it on. Not a case of 'Erin is off, Anna stepped up'. Sense that there's a dual journey.

Danielle: Regarding the heartbreak of being so close to taking on a role and losing it – can't guarantee that a person at the start of a year is going to be there at the point they'd need to take over. Then bad stuff happens and they can't take on. Could be super disappointing.

Tom: As for duration – Anna, for me came into her MQ this year. Lots of convos in Dec about not wanting to do it and not being certain, and I'd like to ask the questions. What is the notice period? What is a fair time? Lots of things need to be in motion. Needs to be fair on the volunteers and person to be selected.

Anna: I felt I was holding it too long for one person. What made me do it this year was Tom making me feel wanted. Part of the problem is that in the first year – you're finding your feet and there's so much internal stuff about feeling good enough. I've watched the GM go through 'how can I deliver this' several times. But the thing with the MQ is that you can't be vulnerable to anyone. Everyone needs you to be the goddess. Not feeling you can say to them: 'I don't what I'm doing', or 'I can't do this ...' I think it's really magical to just have a MQ who is there until she's there but we have a quick membership and only had 6 MQs in 30 years. I don't feel there should be a MQ every year (some agreement) but I feel we should look at it. Five years is a long time.

I feel like we need to ask people how long they want.

Diana: yes, ask people themselves.

Anna: I get that you make an investment, but we have a different makeup of membership and that worked when you had someone for a long time.

Kate: None of us who haven't been through that process can fully understand how those decisions come to a point. We have no idea what that process is like. Thank you.

(applause)

It sounds like a lonely place to be. But I suppose my question is that, having not been through that process, can we make that decision? Obviously everyone has opinions but do we have a right to have expectations imposed on people in those roles?

I don't know what we should expect but it's apparent to me that I have no right to have a MQ for this many years and do these particular things. I can have an opinion but not impose that. We need to consider what we're asking of people in those roles.

Tom: Closing remarks: We'd like to invite anyone to send in anything they feel they couldn't say or haven't had time to say. Email board@beltane.org within the next couple of weeks to add to the process. The board is open to accept comments at all times. Invite others who weren't here to send in thoughts. Please remember we're only volunteers.

Thank you Anna for being there and doing this role.

(Strong applause)

(It was necessary to paraphrase whilst taking minutes due to the nature of the conversation – if you feel your point has been vastly misrepresented or want to add to it, please email nate@beltane.org and I'll add to this document.