

COTSWOLD LINK NETWORK OF U3AS
MINUTES OF HALF YEARLY MEETING HELD 14 OCTOBER 2019
LECHLADE MEMORIAL HALL HOSTED BY FAIRFORD U3A

Present: Jane Flynn (**JF**, Chairman), Dennis Chamberlain (**DC** Treasurer), Jeremy Furtado (**Jer**, Committee member, note taker)

Regional Trustees: Auriol Ainley (**AA**, Midlands), Jill Nicholls (**JN**, Southwest)

Guests: Ian McCannah (**IM**, National Chairman, Stephen Dwyer, National Genealogy Advisor

Delegates from the following member U3As: Bishops Cleeve, Bourton, Bromsgrove, Bromyard, Cam & Dursley, Cheltenham, Churchdown, Cirencester, Droitwich, Evesham, Fairford, Gloucester, Ledbury, Leominster, Newent, North Cotswold, Pershore, Ross and District, Winchcombe, Worcester.

Apologies: Rosemary Wall, Jane Mason

1. Welcome by Marilyn Gibbon, Chairman, Fairford U3A
2. Minutes of last half yearly meeting held 19th March 2019 - accepted without amendment
3. Matters Arising - none
4. Chairman's Remarks

JF thanked Fairford U3A for hosting today's meeting and welcomed members to the lovely surroundings. JF reported that the previous meeting hosted by Bromyard U3A was successful with Fran Walton, Education and Resources Officer, reporting on operations and change of personnel at National Office, followed by an excellent presentation from Alan Russell from Worcester U3A on computer security.

The Cotswold Link held a special interest day in July at Cheltenham entitled "Engineering the Future", which despite a last minute change of speaker was enjoyed and appreciated by nearly 100 attendees. Thanks to Jeremy Furtado for lining up such interesting speakers. There is a full report on the website. It is planned to hold another special interest day next year.

JF has represented the Cotswold Link at meetings of the South West and West Midlands regions and these meetings reinforced the various workshops available. JF reminded members of the website which was available to member U3As to feature items of interest. JF wondered if U3As would like a meeting of welfare/equality officers to discuss mutual aspects of the roles. Coventry & Warwicks U3A Network are holding a workshop on "Interest Groups Matter" on 27 November which members can attend.

JF gave thanks to the Cotswold Link committee for their support. Lynn Glaze stood down as treasurer at the last AGM but due to the new treasurer's commitments has continued to assist in the role, for which many thanks.

At the next AGM JF is standing down so a new chairman for Cotswold Link was needed. Please think about this role to continue the success of the Cotswold Link. Also Rosemary Wall is standing down as an ex-officio officer and it would be good to have a replacement to make a full complement on the committee.

JF is always willing to attend a member U3A meeting if they feel that would be helpful.

5. Treasurer's Report

DC thanked Lynn Glaze and reported that full accounts will be presented at the AGM in March 2020. The current balance is £1,217.89. The committee has decided to keep the accounts at around this level and therefore did not propose to increase annual subscriptions which will remain at £14 per eligible U3A.

6. New U3As

Tetbury now has an active U3A although had not yet responded to the invitation to join the Cotswold Link.

7. Regional Trustee Reports

a. Jill Nicholls

I can safely say that this is the first meeting since the Board met last week that any of the three of us have addressed! We spent two and a half days with colleagues networking and discussing Third Age matters in the widest sense. I leave more of that to Ian who will speak later.

But to more regional matters: and the negative first so we can congratulate ourselves later! Sadly, Emie and Len Haysom from Bath & Wilts have retired due to ill health. Gordon Pardy from Sarum has taken over their role.

Looe Valley in the process of closing.

To more positive matters:

We have now a Regional Support Group consisting of half a dozen members from the region reps who are prepared to offer their help to the RT in this enormous region. They will, I hope continue when I step down next August. HINT!

Here, in Cotswold Link you have a well organised committee running business for you. It's not so throughout the region where at the other extreme, getting groups of U3As to meet at all is hard work.

We have had several birthdays of 10 years or more and I've been invited to some cake cuttings and of course eating! I've visited parts of the region I didn't know existed and found some delightful small roads thanks to my satnav!

New U3As: Tetbury, is our latest, Wilton and Chudleigh are also new, with Culm Valley and Teignmouth well under way. New propositions are Torpoint, Looe and Long Ashton. If you know of an area which would benefit from a U3A please let me know.

I know there have been several Open Days because I've had to sign off their grants, but I can't attend them all.

Theme days : Jurassic Coast again a great success, led by Val Warren (Avalon)

Art and Technology (North Devon) offered a wide variety of talks and workshops from willow sculpture to digital sewing!

Unfortunately I was unable to come to Your own Day in July, as I had to attend a Board meeting. I gather it was a great success too.

Information about National U3A Day I'll leave to Ian

The next meeting of the regional reps is in November when we will have the opportunity to meet Joanne Smith, the new editor of TAM.

That's all from me except to say thank you and keep up the good work.

b. Auriol Ainley

Since the last Link meeting I have visited 6 U3As across the region – generally to talk – birthday celebrations in Hereford, Biddulph's new premises, Shipston's Open Day and others. There have been only one or two trouble shooting queries – if there is a serious issue then Sam in the national office is able to guide with any insurance or legal issues.

I have: attended Language workshop pilot in Aston University, Birmingham

: had network meetings in Kenilworth and mid Staffs.

: talked to several Sight Concern groups in the Birmingham area, connected with U3APlus.

Aldridge U3A held a Senior's Day for their local MP, which was very interesting with many groups concerned with seniors. The local undertakers were really interested to know about U3A as they knew of many people who were now very lonely, and as we all know, this is one of the main praises of U3A.

First time ever, I acted as Meeter and Greeter for the Trust at Birmingham New Street station to point delegates in the direction of Aston University – then joined them for the afternoon and evening and was really surprised at the huge number of subjects on offer, and how hard they all worked. Must go next year – it looked fun!

I am attending a regional Finance Workshop in Stafford tomorrow, a Keeping it Legal in Solihull through their network in November, as well as Interest Groups with Kenilworth network in November too.

The national AGM and Conference was very busy, but lovely to see many West Midlands members there.

We have a regional meeting at the end of the month when we hope to confirm our next year's regional conference – possibly on finding committee members. Sam Mauger will be addressing the meeting.

The most amazing event was held by Cannock Chase early in October– the Robot Challenge! It was a tremendous day, wonderfully organised and several teams nationwide taking part with their robots doing Egg and Spoon Race, Crazy Golf to name a few! It would be wonderful if we could make this a real national event next year – keeping it in the West Midlands as that is where it started!! We managed to get a tweet on the national website, and having met the new editor of TAM, Joanne is really keen to publicise these sorts of event.

International Committee keeps me busy – I attended a European conference in Vienna and will present to the European Federation of Older Students in Poland next week on how our U3A operates, they are keen to know how we do it as we are so successful.

The next Link meeting will be my last – my term as Regional Trustee will finish next August, so if anyone is interested in following on, let me know!

Auriol added that she is going to Poland shortly to promote development of language learning. Polish U3A equivalents who are interested in video and email links with British U3A members to improve their English. In response to a question, she responded that further information is available on the National web site by following the link under “Resources/International”.

8. Ian McCannah, National Chairman

IM confirmed that the national executive committee were planning for the future. The previous Development Plan expired in 2017. During 2018 there had been consultation and the formation of a development plan for the next five years. This was discussed at the 2018 national AGM with a working group formed in the September and had 3 main themes:

- developing the movement
- learning
- raising the profile

(i) Trustees and members were invited to participate actively. Recommendations were made to The Board in July and announced at the 2019 National AGM. It was recognised that the movement continued to grow but the rate of growth had slowed. It was important not to take growth for granted and we must plan for the future.

Learning is our main objective. A new website is being developed and IM said it was an aim to improve access for U3As by replacing Sitebuilder with a new U3A portal that will appear some time in 2020. A few delegates commented on the lack of response from Sitebuilder to requests for changes to individual web sites.

The Resource Centre is being examined as it has a massive library of DVDs which are now almost obsolete. More comprehensive material was planned.

IM said it was imported that TAT raised the profile of the U3A. As part of this aim 3 June 2020 is going to be a National U3A day which will be an opportunity to build on our standing within the community. However we are widely known within rural areas as some U3As receive letters from Parish Councillors, Village Hall Committees etc. Materials for advertising U3A will be available together with grants for approved initiatives for 3 June activities.

ii) U3A Name

The National Executive Committee is very aware that potential members could be uncomfortable with the word 'University'. However there are major problems with a change of name and legally it could cause repercussions. The original strap line has been replaced by 'Learn, Laugh, Live'.

iii) Beacon

IM outlined the history of the development of Beacon by two U3A volunteers, and the technical volunteer could not be replaced. The Trust has now taken over ownership and has employed Adam Walton at National Office to take control. It originally introduced a charge of 50p per member to pay for the system support. Consultants were engaged to review Beacon and concluded that it was a system that held together but had limited functionality e.g. no reflection of requirements of GDPR. A commercial partner will redevelop the system to be operational it is hoped by end 2020.

Ian said that for a few months after his Beacon letter last December, the Trust, if asked, would advise U3A Committees considering adopting Beacon that they needed to do their own due diligence. At this early stage of the Beacon upgrade, it was necessary for the results of the Beacon WG to be received and for the Board to have approved a commercial partner, having done its own due diligence. After explaining this background, Ian then told the Cotswold Link attendees that the Trust was now confident in advising U3As to adopt Beacon prior to the upgrade. This point was strongly made and emphasised by his advising the attendees that there has been a very significant increase in U3As using Beacon over recent months. He also mentioned, in answer to a question on whether the annual fee would remain at £1, that this would be the case given the increase in Beacon revenue over recent months.

Currently 180,000 members are on the system.

Delegates asked a number of questions including (a) migration (yes, support will be provided) to general support (yes). A Beacon User Group will be set up.

Ian could not provide an answer to the question of eventual integration of Beacon and Sitebuilder. Further information will be on the website.

iv) TAM

TAM provides a valuable revenue stream to the Trust from advertising with 250,000 copies printed. It would not attract the same volume of advertising if it was just available on line.

The content will be revised with Joanne Smith's appointment as the new Editor from November 2019. The wrapper will be replaced with a biodegradable version. IM reported that "Sources" has been incorporated into TAM.

v) Trading Company

A trading company has been established because the Charity Commission did not consider merchandising to be part of educational activities. The national committee are considering provision of branded clothing but not sponsored insurance products because of the risks to the U3A's reputation.

Delegates asked that risks to spread of personal data by commercial providers should be controlled. IM replied that there are stringent controls on data handling e.g. for addressing postal copies of TAM.

vi) Barbara Lewis Fund

This fund was established when the former chairman knew she was terminally ill. Donations to the fund are used to help with the setup costs for new U3As and can also include bequests in wills.

Delegates commented that solicitors/accountants keep lists of eligible funds or charities to which this Fund could be added. However the Trust is reluctant to inform funeral directors.

vii) Membership Survey

A survey will take place and 200 U3As have been selected and would cover items such as age, gender, educational levels, of members.

Questions from Delegates

Increasing ethnicity and diversity in U3A membership was raised. IM said there are no easy answers. Auriol said that many ethnic groups exist in Birmingham with knowledge of U3A but very

few have joined. For example, a meeting was arranged in Wolverhampton targeting ethnic groups particularly, with a lot of prior advertising, but only 7 people turned up. It was suggested that first generation migrants might be resistant to moving out of their customary social and cultural groups, but later generations might find it easier.

9. Stephen Dyer, National Genealogy Adviser

Stephen gave a presentation on the various resources and methods for investigating personal and family history. These ranged from the examination of existing records from various source – for example using registry of births, deaths and marriages together with parish records. He also gave the names of various web sites and identified their varied uses. Stephen finished by discussing the various pros and cons of DNA testing.

10. Airing and sharing

A member asked if other U3As found 'new member; coffee mornings useful. It was felt it was a useful arena to meet new members, and possibly identify future group leaders or committee members. It was felt an information pack was useful for new members.

Another question asked what members felt about discounts for married members. There were various views but it was pointed out that postage costs for TAM were reduced if there was one address. However, this is a decision for the local U3A committee.

Alan Green introduced himself as a Trustee Regional Volunteer for the South West with special interest in setting up new U3A groups. He asked members to identify areas where they felt it would be worth setting up a new group.

The meeting closed at 15.35pm.

Date of the Next Meeting: **25 March 2020 to be hosted by Cirencester U3A**