

It was good to meet some of you at the national conference and apologies for the noisy location of our regional meeting which made it rather difficult to communicate. My first year as the regional trustee has been an interesting one with a rather steep learning curve. With approximately 140 U3As in the region it has not been practical to get to visit everyone as well as attend to the various NEC duties so communicating with everyone is one of my big challenges.

There are two aspects to the job of being regional trustee and the first is as a trustee of the Third Age Trust. This is a charity in its own right hence the board of trustees are responsible for the governance of the Trust and setting policy to ensure that it meets its charitable objectives. The Trust is also an employer which brings its own responsibilities.

The main decision making body is the National Executive Committee which is all the officers and trustees. We meet every two months for a two day residential meeting where the first day is spent in discussing reports from sub committees, updates from the CEO and training.

The NEC also has a number of sub committees and working groups looking at specific topics. I am on the governance and finance committees as well as working parties revising the committee reference file and the Trusts constitution.

There are ongoing discussions with the Charity Commission and other regulatory bodies as well as the insurance company so that we can both represent the views of the U3A movement but also cascade down to individual U3As their latest rules or guidance.

For example the Charity Commission has revised some of their guidance and changed to odd word "should" to "must" which makes somethings which were advisory now become mandatory. We are currently in discussions with them about the implications for the individual U3As with the aim of producing definitive guidance as soon as we can.

At the same time there are new requirements for charities to have such things as safeguarding policies as well as new legislation on data protection. Inevitably this means that some sections of the committee reference file (CRF) do not currently reflect current guidance. We have therefore embarked on a complete review of the CRF to both bring it up to date and deal with some inconsistencies. The aim is to eventually have an on-line CRF which will make it easier to keep up to date.

As a result of all these changes the workload for the NEC seems to be growing but at the same time I have responsibilities for the region. Part of this is to help explain information from the Trust and the other to feed-back views and information from the region. Much of my time is taken up with helping U3As resolve problems which range from questions on constitutional matters, finance, AGM procedures to dealing with people problems. I must admit to not expecting some of the problems that U3As ask for help on but then the U3A movement is about learning, my own included.

The region is both large geographically and numerically with six counties and about 140 U3As. The past year has seen two new ones being formed with possibly another two in the pipeline right now. There are five county based networks although they don't follow set boundaries and currently two local cluster groups are being formed in Norfolk. Wherever possible I try to attend network meetings as a way of talking to people from a number of U3As. Apart from the fact that networks help me do my job I always encourage U3As to join as they provide a local support group and facilitate the exchange of ideas.

You will have seen that the national consultation on the governance of the Trust did not show any significant support for dividing up the bigger regions. In practice it would be difficult to divide up this region into two equal sized halves with the very uneven distribution of U3As and taking into account the transport links.

One of the solutions to help regional trustees such as me is to make a much greater use of U3A volunteers, and you will have seen advertisements to this effect in Third Age Matters. I have been delighted that a number of people have come forwards as a result. Some initial training has been started and more is to follow. Nationally the Trust has identified three types of activities where volunteers can help. The first is in setting up new U3As, then running workshops and the third offering help in problem solving. No one will be expected to be working on their own as the plan is to work in conjunction with trustees and in pairs. The initial training is in setting up new U3As and whilst I know that not everyone want to do this the bulk of this is about being able to explain the constitution and financial requirements. As these are the common areas where U3As ask for assistance this training will form the basis of most volunteer activities.

One thing that I am keen to see established are regular induction workshops for new committee members and these are being designed by the Trust at present. Hopefully we can start rolling these out using trained volunteers in the next year.

The Trust is also keen that wherever possible we utilise the skills of U3A members so from time to time you will see adverts in TAM asking for people with specific skills or experience to help with various initiatives. These may be short term working parties and hence not a long term commitment. Whilst none of us who volunteer to help run the U3A movement get paid the Trust does pay expenses.

One last point is that the Trust is always looking at what else it can do to help U3As either in terms of information, grants or more practical activities. For example we are currently looking at how U3As can help our more elderly members continue to benefit from belonging to a U3A. If you have any ideas on this or any other matter please let me know.

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