

It is the start of another fun filled U3A year and I hope it is a good one for everyone. The Third Age Trust has started the year by having to ask all U3As to make some decisions which are explained in the two mailings which went out just before Christmas. Both require decisions to be made in a short time scale for which we apologise but we are having to work with a tight schedule for several reasons. Whilst hopefully the letters and associated document are self-explanatory I thought it might help to highlight the key issues.

The most urgent one for individual U3As is in the second mailing and is about the need for some U3As to make changes to their constitutions. This is to ensure that all U3As are complying with the latest guidance from the Charity Commission which is different to what the Trust had been advising for some time.

In future all U3A activities either educational or social must come within the objects of the U3A and be included in your financial returns. This does not mean having to stop doing anything as we have worked hard with the Charity Commission to ensure that everything that most U3As do can be covered by the proposed constitutional change. Nor does it mean closing social accounts but in future they have to be included when working out your total income.

What does require a fairly quick decision is whether you need to change the object clause of your constitution to the one we have agreed with the Charity Commission. What they have agreed is as follows:

“the advancement of education and, in particular, the education of older people and those who are retired from full time work by all means, including associated activities conducive to learning and personal development”

It is the last phrase which allows the vast majority of what could be regarded as social activities to be legitimate U3A activities. This is also important for insurance purposes as the policy only covers U3A activities.

Any U3A that has adopted the current model constitution in recent years will need to adopt the new object clause as the model one only mentions *“to advance education”* and does not include any social activities. If you have a much older constitution you will need to review it to decide whether it allows social activities. If in doubt the safe option is to adopt the new one.

If you decide you need to change your object clause then you need to inform the Trust by 20th March at the latest by using the special email address: objectclause@u3a.org.uk.

Please note you only have to advise us of your intention to adopt the new clause by then, you can pass this at an EGM or AGM sometime later in the year. In this way we can add you to the list which we will submit to the Charity Commission on your behalf. Individual U3As will not need to deal with the Commission themselves. The letter which you will all have received explains in more detail the changes to the financial regulations for the year starting April 2018.

If you have any questions about any of this you are asked to use the above email address in the first instance rather than phone either the national office or your regional trustee.

The second mailings included a rather large document about proposed changes to the Articles of Association of the Third Age Trust. This is in effect the constitution that governs the Trust and what it can do on your behalf. We are having to bring this up to date to meet current legislation and to incorporate recommendations from the large consultation we undertook last year. We are having to work to a tight timescale on this to get final approval from U3As, lawyers and the Charity Commission ready for an EGM on the 21st of March. This is to allow the election for trustees and officers at the AGM in August to be under the new rules otherwise we have to wait another year.

If you wish to comment on the draft document then we need your input by the 26th of January and please use the special email address: consultation@u3a.org.uk. After that we need this to be passed at an EGM which will be held in Birmingham on the 21st March. If you are unable to attend and cast your vote in person then please use your proxy vote when you get the formal paperwork. As this is a change to our Articles of Association we need to get a sufficient percentage of U3As to vote in favour so we need your vote.

The December mailings also included details of two national workshops covering the latest advice on data protection, safeguarding, equality and insurance. Full details are on the link to the website with one workshop in Leeds on 13th February the other on 5th April in Leatherhead. These workshops may be repeated elsewhere depending on feedback. I shall be at the Leeds event as I am on holiday in April.

Within the region I am planning to offer one of the new nationally developed workshops on "*Running your U3A*" during 2018. This is being piloted at present and once we have enough volunteers trained up to deliver it my plan is to offer this annually hopefully at network or local level to enable as many people as possible to attend. It is intended either as an induction for all new or prospective committee members or an opportunity to update existing ones.

As a result of our recent discussions with the Charity Committee and the need to make some changes to existing constitutions the Trust will be developing a new model constitution in the coming months so this is the year to dig out your old constitution and see if it is still fit for purpose. The planned workshops will be an opportunity to look closely at the latest model constitution and current financial requirements as well as more general advice on running your U3A. Once I have more details of these planned workshops I'll circulate the information.

We have been looking at the regions website recently and have updated parts of it. However there is a lot of what is probably historical information on it and we don't know either who put it there or whether it is still relevant. Can you have a look to see if there is anything relating to you that is out of date and at the same time add any new material that might be of interest to other U3As in the region.

There seems to be quite a lot on the NEC agenda at present much of it is looking at the latest legislation or regulations applicable to charities such as U3As. I will try to keep you all up to date on a regular basis In the meantime have a happy new year.

Jeff Carter East of England Regional Trustee.

