

U3A NETWORK LINK MEETING 1ST MAY 2018

Wesley Euston Conference Centre, London

The agenda topics were based primarily on suggestions and questions submitted by representatives of various groupings, supplemented with presentations by National Trustees and National Office staff.

1. Results of the Groupings Questionnaire:

Ian McCannah gave a PowerPoint presentation of the Survey results. It shows various similarities and differences amongst 'groupings'.

55 Networks out of a possible 75 completed the Questionnaire. This is a very high response rate. It is still open for late responders. The average size of a Network is 16 with numbers of U3A members ranging from 3 to 100. The results indicated a wide variety of the ways that Networks are organised. 61% do not have a website, 66% do not consider a constitution to be necessary, only 10% are registered charities, and only about 40% have bank accounts.

There was a comment about the energy levels required to keep a grouping going, and since they are outside the governance structure of the Trust, there is currently no support available should they flounder. As a result, some do close down.

2. Workshop Project / Committee Recruitment in U3As:A

Alan Prest, Chairman of Herts Network of U3As and a Trust Volunteer is helping the Trust with a survey on the challenges of recruiting of members to run or develop interest groups or to become Trustees in their U3As. He disseminated a survey form with the following 5 questions and requested that answers be sent to him at alan.chairwatfordu3a@gmail.com

- 1) What difficulties has your U3A encountered in recruiting members to help with study/interest groups or standing for election as Trustees?
- 2) What do you think the reasons are for the difficulties in recruiting?
- 3) What strategies/methods has your U3A used to recruit members to these roles?
- 4) How effective have any of these measures been?
- 5) Please add any further comments

There evidently are difficulties, but a number of suggestions were made by attendees regarding successful recruitment techniques. All success stories were welcomed by Sophie Wellings, the Advice and Volunteers Manager at National Office. A national workshop is being prepared and advice on best practice will be posted on the national website.

3. National Programme of Workshops / Update on Trust Volunteers:

Sophie Wellings outlined the list of national workshops available

- Keeping it Legal
- Running Your U3A
- Managing Growth

- Interest Groups Matter
- Communications
- Finance – workshop for Treasurers
- Recruiting Volunteers

The workshops are being delivered on request by Trust Volunteers. There are around 200 Volunteers who have been trained by National Office, with the objective of encouraging consistency and best practice across the UK, Volunteer role descriptions are available from Sophie at sophie.wellings@u3a.org.uk

Trust Volunteers are linked both to the Trust and a region/network but where they work depends on how far they want to travel from their home base.

4. **Why are requests for half day training / education workshops denied?**

Sophie replied that she would be prepared to discuss shorter workshops on request.

5. **Guidance on Finance/Treasurer roles:**

There was a request for advice regarding U3As that have large reserves in their bank accounts. John Ellison, U3A National Treasurer, advised that while there was no legal limit, it was generally not advisable to hold more than 6 months reserves, unless it could be justified as saving for a major expenditure such as renting/buying a property for the U3A concerned. If a charity is dissolved, the funds must be dealt with as described in the constitution and must never be given back to the membership. Charity Commission guidance dictates that accounts must be open to public scrutiny by anyone who asks. Various ways were discussed for reduction of surpluses, such as reducing membership fees, and it was suggested that this could be achieved with a budget or plan to reduce reserves.

6. **Why so much paper from National Office?**

Samantha Mauger agreed that there had been a lot of advice disseminated, partly due to the revision of the Trust's Articles of Association, but there had also been an avalanche of UK legislation since 2010, and National Office had been improving advice that was out of date or inaccurate. Generally-speaking, the Trust was trying to cut down on paper, so the Committee Reference File (aka the Blue Book), and other information is now being produced and disseminated in digital formats via the national website and the new monthly email Office Newsletter which is delivered free of charge directly to any U3A member who subscribes.

A Readership Survey was disseminated as an insert in TAM (Winter 2017 issue #29 p.55) and available as an online survey. The survey results were not very positive about Sources. It was therefore not considered cost-effective to continue disseminating the hard copy supplement with TAM and there will be only 3 more paper issues. It is already being replaced by Source Online <https://sources.u3a.org.uk>. TAM will be reformatted and will include a section that publishes the type of items that would previously have been included in paper Sources. Archives of older issues of Sources can be accessed via the national website, while archives of Sources online are accessible via links on the right-hand side of the Sources Online welcome page.

Members suggested that Francis Beckett, TAM editor be invited to the next NL meeting.

7. **How do the attendees see their role – is it mainly as a communication link or does it also involve giving advice?**

Not much time was spent on this question. Communications was important, but messages didn't always seem to get through to members. Some attendees said that their grouping does provide advice, but the kind of advice and method of communication was not specified.

Auriol Ainley, West Midlands Trustee, handed round copies of a leaflet entitled 'Why join a Network?' highlighting the benefits for U3As of belonging to a network. She invited suggestions on how it could be improved/updated, and offered to draft a new version. Please email your suggestions to Auriol at auriol.ainley@u3a.org.uk

8. **What is the Office Structure and who does what?**

Sam Mauger provided an outline of the staff structure at National Office (attached in the power point presentation)

9. **U3A Plus:**

Hilary Jones, Regional Trustee for Wales, outlined the aims of this working group which provides help, support and advice to U3As to ensure that all their members can access the learning and other activities offered by their U3As, regardless of impairment or disability. Further information is available on the national U3A website at <https://plus.u3a.org.uk/>. Members of the group are also prepared to talk at Network meetings. For further information, please contact Hilary at hilary.jones@u3a.org.uk

10. **Status of U3A groupings/Charity Status/Charity Commission £5,000 threshold:**

Ian McCannah explained that any Network that has adopted the new Objects Clause in their constitution is automatically a charity; those with an annual income over £5,000 need to apply to the Charity Commission for Registered Charity status. Those with an annual income over £10,000 need to submit their accounts regularly to the Charity Commission. Those with over £25,000 need to prepare audited accounts.

Most U3As and groupings are Unincorporated Members Associations which means that Trustees are responsible for financial and other liabilities. It is therefore important to have the accounts inspected regularly. However, unless the Trustees have been knowingly negligent or fraudulent, they are covered by the Trustee Liability insurance, provided by the Third Age Trust.

The Trust is considering developing template Network Constitutions for groupings that are both charities and those that are not.

The Trust's new Articles of Association do allow for new categories of membership. Consideration is being given to a category that would allow U3A groupings to become members of the Trust, if they wished. This issue is at the early stage of development and NL members will be consulted before any definite decision is taken

Any constitutional questions should be referred to Sam Mauger at sam.mauger@u3a.org.uk

11. **The Impact of U3A:** Pam Jones announced that the Trust is conducting a survey about the Impact of U3A on members and local communities. Sam Mauger has commissioned a literature review by an external consultant, and members have been asked to complete an online questionnaire <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/u3a-impact>
12. In addition, some focus groups are being conducted around the UK. The report will be launched at a reception at Westminster on 10th July. Pam is now seeking to invite guests who could be considered 'influencers' in favour of U3A. All regions and networks are urgently requested to nominate at least one 'influencer' and send their nominations to Pam via their Regional Trustee.
13. **Data protection:** the GDPR guidance paper for individual U3As is on the U3A national website.

There is no specific guidance yet for Networks. Sophie Wellings said she would advise on the legal basis for networks although there are potentially many variations.

On the question of how long charities need to retain archival information, it is generally 12 months unless consent is given for specific reasons to keep it longer; HMRC require retention of certain information for 7 years.
14. **Growing the U3A**

Only about 5% of the general population in the Third Age range are members of U3A. The U3A National Development Sub-Committee has a small working group looking at how to grow the movement.
15. **Should the Network Link meetings be split between urban and rural groupings?**

Responses to this question were mixed and the question was eventually retracted because there were so many differences amongst 'groupings'. It was agreed that there should not be different meetings for different types of groupings, but there might be some merit in discussing certain issues in 'break out' groups.
16. **How do networks communicate with the U3As in their grouping?**

This was not discussed
17. **Any other points**

How can Networks contribute to the Trust's Strategic Plan? The cut-off date for responses was the end of April, but only a few responses had been received from Networks. It was not too late to respond, and Ian offered to re-issue the invitation.
18. **Vote on Next Network Link meeting venue (Autumn '18)** London. Date since confirmed as 12th October.