

Networks and Small Groupings of U3As

WHAT IS A NETWORK?

Network is a generic term for groups of U3As which have chosen to work together for support and the mutual benefit of the members of the U3As concerned. They form organically and are not imposed by any external source. They adopt various titles to suit their style and their purpose e.g. link, forum, association.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A NETWORK AND A REGION?

A network is organic in that it is formed by consenting U3As. It may be large or small, completely informal or governed by a constitution. A region is in effect a constituency. The UK is divided into nine English regions and the three countries of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales for electoral purposes with each region nominating and electing a trustee to the National Executive Committee. In some parts of the country the network and the region are the same geographically.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NETWORKS AND REGIONS?

It varies. Some networks have no contact with their region while others operate independently but invite their Regional Trustee to meetings. In some regions, the networks are fully integrated into the structure and send representatives to regional/regional support meetings.

DO ALL U3AS HAVE TO BELONG TO NETWORKS?

No. Membership of a network is voluntary.

WHY SHOULD A U3A JOIN A NETWORK?

It provides the opportunity to meet others with similar responsibilities and share experiences, discuss new ideas, develop solutions to challenges and participate in network organised events such as workshops and study days. If your U3A does not participate, it may be deprived of potential benefits. However, it is entirely your decision.

DO WE HAVE TO JOIN THE NEAREST ONE TO US?

No.

CAN A U3A BELONG TO MORE THAN ONE NETWORK?

Yes. Some U3As choose to belong to more than one network, especially if they are situated on county borders. Additionally, in some places there may be small networks of, say, four or five neighbouring U3As working together inside a larger network.

DO NETWORKS HAVE SET BOUNDARIES?

Boundaries vary with local practice and are determined by the member U3As so they may or may not follow county boundaries. They may also cross regional boundaries.

WHAT DO NETWORKS DO?

This depends on what the member U3As forming the Network want and can offer but it may include:

- Developing and sharing lists of potential speakers.
- Organising network study/interest days for members of the network's U3As (and sometimes neighbouring U3As).
- Organising training/information events for U3A committee members, potential committee members, group leaders/convenors etc.
- Organising shared learning projects.
- Establishing links with outside organisations, such as universities, and participating in local initiatives.
- Providing a regular forum for member U3As to meet together to share information, disseminate good practice and discuss issues of concern..
- Sharing resources and setting up reciprocal interest group arrangements between members of the network.
- Producing a newsletter.
- Arranging inter-U3A competitions.
- Increasing awareness of U3A in the community.

ARE THERE ANY GRANTS AVAILABLE TO NETWORKS TO ORGANISE EVENTS?

The Trust is keen to encourage small groups of U3As to arrange workshops/seminars on topics concerned with the running and future development of their U3As. Any small group of U3As which would like to hold such an event may apply for a grant from The Trust to cover hall hire and associated administrative costs and possibly a contribution towards refreshments. For more information, contact the National Office.

HOW OFTEN DO NETWORKS MEET?

It is up to the member U3As to decide but usually between two and four times a year to maintain a momentum.

HOW DO NETWORKS COMMUNICATE?

Often by email, via a website or through newsletters but it is up to each network to decide.

DO NETWORKS CO-OPERATE WITH ONE ANOTHER?

It is up to the member U3As to decide but there are good examples of networks coming together to organise conferences, residential schools, study days and social events as well as sharing good practice, speaker lists etc.

HOW ARE NETWORKS ORGANISED?

It varies. Networks choose their own organisational structure. Some are very informal with no constitution or procedural rules, no committee and no bank accounts. Instead the U3As take it in turns to organise meetings and events. Other networks may prefer to have a constitution which governs the running of the network and defines frequency of meetings, rules for elections to the committee, banking arrangements etc. If you intend to set up a network bank account you will need a constitution.

HOW ARE NETWORKS FUNDED?

Many networks levy a small fee per member on their member U3As. Others charge one flat rate or a fee related to membership bands. Some choose not to do this and ensure that all events are self-funded, but it is important that networks remain solvent.

WHAT INVOLVEMENT DOES THE THIRD AGE TRUST HAVE WITH NETWORKS?

The Trust is extremely supportive of networks and recognises the important part they play currently in both the lives of individual U3As and the movement as a whole, and the increasingly significant part they will play as the number of U3As continues to rise. In addition, as stated, funding is available for networks to organise meetings/seminars on aspects of running a U3A and the Trust would be happy to provide advice and help with the programme.

DO NETWORKS HAVE LINKS WITH NATIONAL OFFICE?

Network chairmen or secretaries can request hard copies of the national mailings that go to U3A Secretaries but they are also available in the members' area of the website.

DO NETWORKS PLAY ANY PART IN THE ELECTION OF REGIONAL TRUSTEES?

No. They cannot nominate or second candidates and they have no voting rights. These are held exclusively by individual U3As which make up the membership of the Trust.

WHAT IF THERE IS NO NETWORK IN OUR PART OF THE COUNTRY OR WE CANNOT GET TO THE MEETINGS OF OUR NEAREST ONE?

There is nothing to stop a small group of U3As setting one up or setting up a cluster/forum/ association and sending a representative from that to network meetings/events, to spread the load.

HOW DO WE FIND OUT WHAT NETWORKS CURRENTLY EXIST?

Either by contacting your regional trustee or by looking at your regional website.