



## **Northumbria Region U3A**

### **Draft Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting**

**Held at Brunswick Methodist Church Hall, Newcastle**

**on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

**From 10.15 to 15.15**

**Attendees:** -Jean Cubbin (Whitley Bay), Cecilia Coulson (Whickham), Ray Scudder (Bede of Jarrow), Brian Green (Bede of Jarrow), J Fielding (Bishop Auckland), Lorraine Skeen (Derwent Valley), Val Green (Derwent Valley), Irene Best (Derwent Valley), Evelyn Gardner (Derwent Valley), Mo Brown (Newcastle), Janey Devoy (Newcastle), Catherine Stevenson (Newcastle), P Jones (Newcastle), Mike Wallace (Newcastle), Janice Leach (Seaham & District), Ted Watt (Seaham & District), Malcolm Wilkinson (Seaham Harbour), Ruth Beckett (South Durham), Linda Chadd (South Durham), Sue Clark (South Durham), Mary Barlow (Sunderland), Doug Knox (Wearside), Jean Barnett (Wessington), Peter Barnett (Wessington), Arthur Coulson (Whickham), Ian Bedwell (Whitley Bay), Andrew Freckingham (Whitley Bay), D Garman (Whitley Bay), Kath Reed (Whitley Bay), Kelvin Rushworth (Wooler), Terry Kirkham (Newcastle).

**Apologies:** - None received.

**Welcome:** - Cecilia Coulson (CC), Regional Chair, welcomed everyone to Brunswick Methodist Church Hall and informed the meeting of the housekeeping and safety rules.

**Fit for the Future presentation by Alan Walmsley, Vice Chair of the Trust.** Further information can be found at [FFTF explanation document.01.pdf \(mcusercontent.com\)](https://mcusercontent.com/FFTF_explanation_document.01.pdf)

There is a tendency to view decisions made by the Board as distant from u3as, largely because u3as don't understand what the Board does. Even though Board Trustees are elected from each region/nation, the principal role of trustees, at the moment is to protect the interests of the Trust, and not to represent the interests of their electorate.

To address these problems, a new forum is proposed where u3a issues can be raised, discussed, and resolved.

A u3a Council would focus on u3a concerns, where interests and ideas can be properly discussed and used to shape the future of this movement. It will also provide a greater opportunity for two-way communications.

The proposal is that two Council representatives would be drawn from each region/nation and 3 members will represent u3a networks.

A smaller u3a Board would focus on ensuring that the Third Age Trust meets all the requirements of the Charities Commission and corporate law.

All Board and Council members would be drawn from the u3a membership and would be proposed and seconded and they would be elected by the membership.

In the case of Council representatives, members would be elected by the u3as in their region/nation or by networks.

In the case of Board membership, all trustees would be elected by all u3as.

It will take some time for the u3a Council to find its feet and demonstrate its value.

Some of the initial terms of reference are:

To promote the needs of u3as and identify overall trends.

To contribute to the overall strategy development of the u3a movement and the annual budget preparation process.

To support and promote national u3a initiatives.

To encourage participation for regional and local multi-u3a initiatives.

To ensure the Council is effective, members would be expected to establish clear two-way lines of communication with their u3as. This would ensure that initiatives would only be pursued when u3as see their value.

The Council would monitor and advise on the initiatives and proposals being developed by groups of staff and volunteers as part of delivering the movements annual strategic aims.

The aim of the proposals is to create a serious forum for promoting the interests and concerns of u3as, run by u3a members and for the benefit of u3as.

The Board will not seek to introduce any changes unless it has confidence that the changes will be seen by u3as as providing value in the future.

All u3as will be invited to a presentation and to ask questions about the changes during January – April 2024. There is also an ongoing opportunity for u3as to provide comments to a dedicated email address at [governance@u3a.org.uk](mailto:governance@u3a.org.uk)

During May/June 2024 the Board will decide whether to submit a formal resolution to the AGM in October 2024. If this special resolution is passed by 75% of votes cast, there would be a period of elections during which members would be elected to a new u3a Council and a new u3a Board. At the end of this transition period, the current Pilot Council and current Board would be dissolved and the u3a Council and Board would be introduced. We would expect this to be completed by April 2025.

An email titled Fit for the Future – Consultation which included an explanation document and a question and answer document has been sent to all Chairs in January 2024.

Ruth Beckett of South Durham u3a asked for clarification on the 3 Network members.

AW - One is expected to be the Chair of a Network Link with two vacancies being for candidates.

Linda Chadd of South Durham u3a asked to explanation on nominations to Committee and skills required.

AW – This area has not been fully sourced as we do not know if this scheme will be going ahead but good interpersonal skills would be required.

Malcolm Wilkinson of Seaham Harbour – This seems a sensible way forward.

Peter Barnett of Wessington – Thanked AW for the presentation and hoped that Northumbria as a Region would be able to help. He noted that the national website needs streamlining.

Jean Cubbin and Cecilia Coulson came to the floor and reminded everyone we were the first to have this presentation. It is hoped to hold a national Zoom

presentation/meeting in March. Jean Cubbin offered to visit and talk to u3as on this subject.

Carol Reed of Whitley Bay said information will be key to getting this passed at the AGM. Also is there to be a summary produced of the trial Council results.

AW – It is expected that there would be a report once an evaluation of the trial has been completed. Sandi Rickerby and Jean Cubbin have been to the trial Council meetings.

Mo Brown of Newcastle u3a. What has been suggested over time will give the representatives more time to spend with u3as. Regional Committees work out events and set budgets and this experience could be invaluable on national committees.

AW – Nothing has changed yet and Jean has her budget for the next financial year. There are also national grants available which to date have not been fully utilised.

Catherine Stevenson of Newcastle u3a – Informal networks have not been mentioned and what role do you see for them.

AW – These do not feature in the current plan, but the region will have people on the Committee.

Arthur Coulson of Whickham – The problem is getting people to take part and Committees in the first place. The Trust needs to get its image right. It is up to us to get this plan over to our members.

AW – The Trust is made up of u3a members. The London office covers an area smaller than this room. Some members work two days in the office and three at home. We do not have a large staff and many work part time. The office is supported by Trust Volunteers.

The national office is compiling lists of a) those u3as attending these presentations b) questions raised along with the responses.

**Finance:** - Cecilia Coulson after this presentation then asked the Treasurer Mike Wallace to take the floor. MW reminded members that a draft set of accounts were available by the door for everyone to take a copy. There is a deficit of £1,200 in line with the recommendations made by David Pattison who scrutinised the accounts last year.

He also noted that the Regional Committee propose that no Regional Subscriptions should be charged during the financial year 2024/5 and this will be brought to the AGM in April.

Jean Cubbin then took the floor to comment on raising the profile of the u3a which came up during the presentation. She noted that Boom Radio are going to support the u3a.

Janice Leach of Seaham & District u3a raised a query on the Brand Centre. It seems there are problems adding more than the u3as name to an advertising poster and this has been noted.

Jean Cubbin has some leaflets at home for distribution on explaining the ethos of u3as. There is a limited supply so please let her know if you require some.

**IT:** - Mo Brown then spoke about the IT Network which is held via Zoom on a Tuesday morning. She also asked people to look at the display she had set up.

Cecilia Coulson and Mo Brown then spoke regarding Site Work. The national office aims to set up Zoom meetings with approximately 50 people at a time attending to bring people up to speed with the new system. Various u3as including Berwick are already using this system.

Site Builder will not close until all u3as have moved over onto the new system.

**Constitution:** - There are proposed changes to the constitution which is being posted to the Region's website.

**Minutes:** - It was agreed the minutes of the 24th October 2023 meeting were an accurate record. This was proposed by Mo Brown and seconded by Malcolm Wilkinson.

**Matters arising:** - None.

**Chairs Report:** - Cecilia Coulson reintroduced herself to the meeting.

Interest or Subject Networks are very much in vogue at the moment. There are 6 Networks in the Region the latest being the Geology Network run by Elizabeth Devon who is involved with Wooler u3a and is also a member of Duns and District in Scotland. CC has contacted Ann Walsh Chair of Scotland u3a to agree this.

Does everyone know what members of the Regional Committee do? What we propose to achieve is written down in the 2023/26 Three Year Plan which is on the Regions website.

Northumbria Region advises and supports 9,000 members. The Regional Committee only has 7 members. The Regional Support Team included the Regional Committee plus 3 more members making 10 in total. The Regional Events Team has 6 members which included Malcolm Wilkinson and CC.

The Events Team is organising a variety of events for 2024 that have been or will be advertised on the Regional website, on the Regions Face book page and also in Messenger.

CC apart from being Chair of Northumbria Region is lead for the Northumbria Region Creative Writers Network.

Prior to the pandemic Northumbria Region had 12 committee members plus 6 Regional Trust Volunteers which enabled the Committee to organise workshops, educational events, and source different venues for the Quarterly Meetings. Post pandemic we are now running on a nearly empty tank and also, we are not getting any younger.

We desperately need more Committee members. The Committee members we have will be/could be standing down next year. I will be standing down in 2025. The Committee has no Vice Chair.

We need members desperately to come forward to assist our committee and take on responsibilities in the future.

The next meeting will be the AGM on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

Following the meeting Pat Hodgson gave a talk on Plant Pots and Bampots – a typical night in a Glaswegian pub. Pat began with photographs of her beautiful garden (The Beacon at Stocksfield, open to the public) and this was followed by a short play in which she acted all the parts. Donations received would be given to the NSPCC.

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