



## Northumbria Region U3A

### Minutes of the Zoom Quarterly Meeting

Held on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023

From 10.00 to 15.30

**Attendees:** - Cecilia Coulson (Whickham), Denyse Organ (Ashington), Linda Broady (Ashington), Marcia Bircham (Ashington), Pam Thompson (Ashington), Pat Robbins (Ashington), Martin Rowell (Berwick), Ann Carr (Bishop Auckland), Ann Handley (Blyth), Dawn Tweddell (Blyth), Vanessa Storey (Blyth), Moira Stokoe (Guisborough), Pam Turner (Morpeth), Sandi Rickerby (Morpeth), Mike Wallace (Newcastle), Philip Jones (Newcastle), Ted Watt (Seaham), Jan Leach (Seaham), Malcolm Wilkinson (Seaham Harbour), Jim Redden (Washington), Keith Allison (Washington), Christa Lloyd (Wearside), Doreen Lloyd (Wearside), John Lloyd (Wearside), Doug Knox (Wearside), Jean Barnett (Wessington), Peter Barnett (Wessington), Arthur Coulson (Whickham), Andrew Freckingham (Whitley Bay), Jean Cubbin (Whitley Bay), Mary Dunning (Whitley Bay), Pat Johnson (Durham).

**Apologies:** - Shirley Walkinshaw (Baldon), Catherine Stevenson (Newcastle), Mary Barlow (Sunderland), Trevor Robinson (Alnwick), Mo Brown (Wooler).

**Regional Trustees Report** Sandi Rickerby began by talking about the proposed Council at National Office. Sandi gave an account of her current workload from sitting on the Board of Directors to being on numerous committees plus her work in region. She thanked Cecilia for taking the helm and developing initiatives in the region.

It is proposed that the Regional Trustees are no longer on the Board of Directors. There are currently fifteen Board members, and it is suggested that in the future the number should be around seven or eight. These will be people with experience in finance, governance, charity law etc.

A proposal will be that the Council will have twelve Trustees plus members from various Networks etc. These members will bring topics relevant to members for discussion to the Council and pass information back to the Networks. It is intended that the Council will be u3a member lead. The exact number of members on the Council, its aims, roles, remit responsibilities have not yet been identified.

Notes from a Board Meeting held 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

This was a face to face meeting. Main items discussed:

- **CEO Report.** The CEO provided a report for the quarter of all current activities and main responsibilities of the Heads of Department and key staff. A summary of the report will be available on the u3a website under Trust and Trustee Updates.
- **Report from the Steering Group.** The Steering Group Chair explained that the Pilot Council had met for a second time with an augmented membership. In effect the Pilot Council was reflecting its wide diverse membership in the views expressed but the manner in which members contributed and the information available was seen as a positive step in its

development. The Steering Group would be reviewing the latest position at its next meeting and this would determine how the next stage of the pilot phase would be handled.

- **Pilot u3a Council meeting 14 June 2023** - The Council Chair reported on the meeting the previous day, the first face to face meeting with an augmented membership. The Council had considered different ways to engage with u3as, and had received reports from the Development and Learning Committees, as well as the Communications and External Affairs Committee (CEAC), and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDI). Council members had also shown support for proposals for a possible u3a Festival at York University in mid-July, and proposals for a benefits scheme that would be available to u3a members in the autumn. Members were also invited to propose a different title for the Council that may better reflect its role and intentions, as well as thoughts on a modernisation of the model constitution for u3as, and proposals for u3a week in September. Finally members heard about proposals for the Council to play an active part in the annual budget and strategy cycle showing how ideas and proposals from u3as can be considered for inclusion.
- **Risk Register.** Board members reviewed the latest consolidated risk register combining risks from the trading subsidiary with those of the Trust. Two items were identified as the highest risks - financial risk of not recovering u3a membership to pre-Covid levels, and the reputational and operational risk of not achieving progress with the Digital Strategy. Although each risk is accompanied by mitigation arrangements, the risks need to be identified in the Annual Report as part of the audit process.
- **Festival 2024.** Following support at the u3a Council the previous day, Board members approved a proposal to plan and deliver a u3a Festival in mid-July 2024 at York University. The concept of a programme of u3a activities, music, tours and tournaments spanning a three day, mid-week period was warmly received, and every effort will be made for the organisation to be by u3a members with u3a members delivering all activities. York University had been chosen for its excellent and compact indoor and outdoor facilities as well as being convenient for rail and road connections - in addition the local management team had offered good support. Full communication with the membership will start during the summer period and all Board members were asked to spread the word where possible.
- **Policies.** The Board approved various policies that relate to the Trust staff, volunteers and trustees: Environmental, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and Safeguarding. In addition the Board approved a policy supporting u3as requiring advice and a Health & Safety template.
- **AGM Resolutions.** It was confirmed that the Trust Board does not intend to propose any resolutions for the AGM in October, but Board members received information and legal advice on resolutions received from u3as, agreeing those resolutions that complied with Standing Orders and legal requirements, and those that did not. Further discussion is expected with the u3as concerned.
- **Digital Strategy.** Whilst much of the next stage of implementation of the Digital Strategy awaits the appointment of a Chief Digital Information Officer, it was agreed to communicate widely within the movement the progress that had already been made in many of the technical fields within the u3a office and volunteer teams. For example, the introduction of Zendesk and Netsuite was already improving the manner in which u3as interact with the office, and developments in Siteworks and Beacon had already enabled significant progress to be made.

- **Fundraising.** Recognising the need to diversify income, Board members heard about intentions to seek legacies and promote donations through the u3a website. In order to ensure that future fundraising efforts are conducted legally, openly, honestly and respectfully, the Board approved an intention to register with the Code of Fundraising Practice as overseen by the Fundraising Regulator.
- **u3a Week.** Plans for u3a week in September were outlined and all members were invited to encourage their u3as to participate and share events, no matter how large or how small. Details will be communicated widely throughout the movement.

Sandi has attended a Pilot Council with Jean Cubbin whom it is proposed will be our next Regional Trustee.

This Pilot Council is still evolving and will not be fully implemented until it has been voted on by ordinary members.

Mary Dunning suggested that it would be good to have a synopsis of the proposed changes on the National website.

**Chairs Report from Cecilia Coulson.** The idea of a Regional Quarterly Meeting is to impart information from Region and National to all u3as in the Network. The current feeling is that meetings are too business like and formal and we need to put the fun back into it.

The Region would like a representative from every u3a to attend the Regional Quarterly Meetings.

Information is on the National and Regional websites. Do you look at them? Does the information get back to your committee and members? Peter Barnett the regions web master feels our website is user friendly. Members agreed but many found the National site very difficult to use.

Liz Thackery has visited the South West and Yorkshire and is interested in visiting actual u3as to find out about the positives and negatives they come across. She has been each area for three days. She is most interested in meeting those 'on the shop floor.' Should we invite her to Northumbria Region?

**Mike Wallace Treasurer** gave an update on the Regions finances. Monies had been paid out from Ryton and the balance of the Jesmond Funds. He sent emails out to treasurers of each u3a asking for their bank details only to find 44 out of our 48 groups responded despite numerous reminders. He found that some of the information held on Beacon was out of date.

John Lloyd asked for information on the specialist IT Officer that National Office are looking to employ and where will it be advertised. Sandi Rickerby said she believes they will be looking for someone in the London area who will be expected to work two days per week in the office and three from home. The salary is unknown at the moment but will be in keeping with current rates. John Lloyd asked who gave the advice on what sort of person and qualifications needed. Sandi Rickerby replied there was a role description.

A query arose from the members why the National Office was in London. Sandi Rickerby said that other areas had been looked at but you had to remember that if the office was relocated there would be redundancy payments to consider plus training issues for new staff members.

Malcolm Wilkinson asked if we knew how many u3as used Beacon. Cecilia Coulson said that it had been worked out that about 50% used the system. Christa Lloyd commented that only about 15% of Wearside's u3a were computer literate.

A comment from the floor was that on using Beacon many found they then received unsolicited emails and phone calls. A number of u3as agreed with this comment while an equal number said this did not apply to them. Sandi Rickerby will verify who has access to email addresses. A comment from the floor was that they thought nobody had access. Members agreed that they delete and block unwanted emails/calls. It was pointed out by Ann Carr and Cecilia Coulson that Beacon is encrypted so no emails, contact details of members can be accessed via this platform.

Cecilia Coulson asked the floor what are the concerns in the members u3a. Are your meetings more social than learning? Do they use online learning? What good practices can you share with other u3as. Do you look at the Regional Website? Do you read Messenger and could you write an article for the magazine and include a photograph?

The Quarterly Minutes and the monthly Committee Minutes are on the Regions website do you read them?

Do you look at the Regions Facebook Page? Have you thought about advertising an event on it or posting an article on something your u3a has done?

Cecilia Coulson then went to each table asking if they had any questions.

One question was on venues and online meetings. The Events Team attempts to find venues around the region that are suitable and accessible. Region does subsidise these events.

Would u3as working more closely together give more vibrancy to events?

Some members wanted to work more closely with other u3as in their area while some wanted to keep things much as they are.

Do members know about Networks? The Networks in the region are listed on the website but do we need more?

The Regional Support Team look to support u3as. Pam Turner and Sandi Rickerby from Morpeth u3a are happy to assist Ashington in any way they can.

Christa Lloyd said that Wearside u3a are looking for temporary premises while the Community Centre while is being renovated and extended.

Peter Barnett took up the problem that Mike Wallace found about the information on Beacon not being up to date. There is a dedicated spot on our website where information and forms can be found to amend information the region holds on each u3a.

Peter Barnett also spoke about trying to update the Speakers List. Jane Mathieson said that her Network were sharing information about Speakers, but it would not necessarily be relevant to other u3as in the region. Peter Barnett then said that the main list was also divided into areas.

Cecilia Coulson reminded everyone what when members give a talk at another u3a they cannot be paid for doing so but they can claim travel expenses.

Other issues raised where how do we attract younger members. Do u3as find that members are still providing childcare for families.

After the meeting ended Arthur Coulson gave a very well received talk on the Development of the Steam Engine. The talk was called It's Not rocket Science with a short silent movie starring Buster Keaton taking a steam train ride across America's wastelands.

Date of the next meeting 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Name	Cecilia Coulson	Position	Regional Chair	Date	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
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Name	Mary Barlow	Position	Secretary	Date	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
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