



## Northumbria u3a Three-Year Plan (2023 – 2026)

### High Priority 3: promote involvement in quarterly meetings

#### REPORT FOR REGIONAL SUPPORT TEAM

Extract from the Three-Year Plan:

Narrative Summary	Objective	Implementation	Priority	Means of Verification/ Evaluation
Promote involvement in regional quarterly meetings by requesting ideas for meeting content, speakers and possible activities at meetings.	To have local u3as working with a 'bottom up' approach and channel ideas from the grass roots to keep the Region relevant to the membership	Articles in newsletter, actively promoting the development of ideas at local u3a level for discussion and implementation by region.	High	Feedback from members annually at the end of each year.

Members of the Working Group (WG):

Kelvin Rushworth (KR), Mo Brown (MB), Pam Turner (PT)

#### Structure of Northumbria u3a Quarterly Meetings

Historically and more recently, the structure of each Quarterly Meeting has differed slightly. Usually, the 'business meeting' and discussions about related topics have started at 10.30 am until lunchtime. After lunch, ending at around 3.30 pm, the afternoon session has included one or two Guest Speakers or a workshop/detailed discussion about a current 'hot topic'.

The WG discussed, at length, a variety of structures including longer and shorter days, different approaches to 'business items' and the 'event headline' of 'exciting/attention-grabbing' beginnings and endings.

However, these discussions were largely redundant as, before this report was presented, Northumbria u3a Trustees/Regional Support Team members made decisions about the timing and structure of future Quarterly Meetings.

### Content of Northumbria u3a Quarterly Meetings

The WG had lots of ideas and had lengthy fascinating discussions about the type of content that could be considered for the afternoon sessions (however long or short the afternoon sessions might be). It was agreed that there should be a 'draft programme' of the four Quarterly Meetings which could form the basis of consultations with u3as before final decisions were made by Northumbria u3a Trustees/Regional Support Group members.

There was general agreement that sessions should follow the "learn, laugh, live" principle with a lighter touch and including more fun. Examples of the type of content discussed included ...

**performances** (eg musical, theatrical, historical) featuring, if possible, the huge variety of talent in some u3as

**demonstrations** (eg food, craft, technology, hobbies, painting, pottery) again featuring, if possible, the huge variety of skills possessed by some u3a members. Occasionally, performances or demonstrations may be by external contacts but should be provided free or at low cost

**sports and physical activities** – could be live or via Zoom, coupled with visits to relevant sporting venues, using contacts with u3a members locally and across the UK

**lively, entertaining, passionate and enthusiastic guest speakers** (usually free or just travel expenses) from universities, charities, NHS and local authorities

**workshops** on topics common to most u3as and relevant to current situations

**workshops** provided by u3a-UK, either face-to-face or via Zoom.

It was felt inappropriate to use Northumbria u3a membership fees/surpluses for 'expensive' speakers or subsidised lunches. Any kind of 'reimbursements' should be to ALL u3as and not just to attendees at Quarterly Meetings.

### Lunches at Northumbria u3a Quarterly Meetings

These discussions proved to be complex but fascinating! Increasingly, as well as vegetarian options, diners are becoming used to vegan options as well as meat and fish choices.

More allergies are being identified and medically-required diets are more common. Preferences, rather than allergies or diets, are ever more complex and demanding.

There is an argument for 'bring your own lunch', as attendees know their own allergies, dietary requirements and preferences. It was noted that, at current Quarterly Meetings, a small minority of members do this, already.

A similar option is for attendees to buy their own lunch either in or near to the venue.

Of course, there is an argument for what has become the 'traditional' Quarterly Meeting lunch – a cold buffet with one or two hot dishes and a huge variety of savoury and sweet options.

It may be possible to identify an acceptable outside caterer who would provide such lunches at every venue used. Alternatively, outside caterers and organisations like the Women's Institute providing lunches, could be identified at each of the separate venues.

If lunches are provided, there was agreement that 'lunch tickets' should be provided to ensure that all attendees were able to have a 'good lunch' on a fair basis.

It may be useful to create a three-person Team to explore and confirm lunch arrangements, once venues have been agreed. The different ideas could be tried out across a year of Quarterly Meetings.

### Venues for Northumbria u3a Quarterly Meetings

Lengthy and interesting discussions focused on Quarterly Meeting venues. There are sound arguments for rotating venues around the Northumbria u3a area across the year (eg one in Tees Valley, one in Northumberland, one just north of the Tyne and one just south of the Tyne). But, of course, there are equally sound arguments for holding all four Quarterly Meetings in the year at a central venue (eg in or near to Durham City).

Maybe, one year could have venues rotating around the area and the next year could have all four meetings in the same venue. There should be careful monitoring of which u3as were represented at which meetings (was there one delegate or was there more than one?). The results may give a steer to choosing future venues.

There was general support for the idea which is being trialled in the current year (ie holding the meetings on different days of the week).

It is essential, with ever increasing travel costs, that venues should be very near to train and bus stations. Of course, in addition, there should be ample easy parking with provision for disabled attendees, near to the main entrance of the venue. It is desirable to have a large space for plenary sessions and several smaller spaces for breakout sessions. It is possible to include both delegates and guest speakers from anywhere, using a hybrid model. The venue needs to have a really good and reliable internet connection (both for hybrid meetings and for the use of YouTube, for example).

A ceiling-fixed projector, large blank wall or portable screen, microphone/s, hearing loop, subtitles and sign language interpreter have become common in well-used public venues. Northumbria u3a should aspire to be thoroughly inclusive and have access to all of these facilities.

There was much discussion about the creation of a three-person Team to 'roam the Northumbria u3a area' to identify appropriate venues. Elsewhere, a decision has been made, already, to create a Team to plan and organise Quarterly Meetings. The proposed Lunches Team and the proposed Venue Team could be the same trio!

Advice and on-the-spot assistance should be requested from u3as, many of which use excellent venues for their own meetings. If at all possible, venues with a close affiliation to specific religious organisations should be avoided (another strand of inclusivity).

### Recommendations

The planning and organising of **Northumbria u3a Quarterly Meetings should be an exemplar** for the meeting practices of u3as across the area.

**Exciting and attention-grabbing beginnings and endings** are really important.

Across the year, if at all possible, there should be **a variety of content approaches** (eg Q1: performance, Q2: demonstration, Q3: sport/physical activity and Q4: guest speaker). Workshops could be organised separately from Quarterly Meetings, to ensure more accurate targeting of attendees.

Across one year, the Lunches Team could trial **different ways of organising lunches**. Across two years, the Venues Team could trial rotating venues in one year and the same venue each time in the other year.

**Kelvin Rushworth, Mo Brown and Pam Turner**

(with a written comment from one u3a and telephone conversations/email exchanges with several u3as across the Northumbria u3a area)

**July 2023**