

Report on Election of Committee Members

1. Structure of the Committee

1.1 Structure of the Committee

Our current Constitution (6, ii) allows us to elect **not less than 5** and **not more than 12** members; 5 being the absolute minimum necessary meet the requirements for the honorary officers (**Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Business Secretary, Committee Secretary, and Treasurer**).

We are allowed **up to 7 more** (6, ii, b) elected members, the actual number depending on the needs of the particular U3A. Historically, Torfaen U3A has always sought to elect the full complement of 7 in order to achieve as wide a representation as possible from the active groups.

However, at our committee meeting in May 2016, a quick survey of the officers present revealed that none found their actual duties overly onerous. Responsibilities held by non-officer members included Speaker Secretary and Registrar of Torfaen U3A assets. It is reasonable to assume that neither of these roles has proven particularly irksome to the holder.

This leads us to question whether we actually do need all 7 committee members to carry out the functions required by Torfaen U3A. We could feasibly reduce that number to 5, or even 4, without loss of function and still have several members to cover for absences. Such a decision to have fewer members **would not need a change to the Constitution**, but could be set as a matter of policy by the committee itself.

With regard to seeking as wide as possible a representation across the active groups, examination of the current committee might very well show that groups are fairly represented anyway, as a number of committee members participate in several groups.

1.2 Quorum requirements

In order to actually hold a committee meeting we need **at least one-third** of the committee members to be present (Constitution 8, iv). Even if we were to reduce the non-officer roles to 4, giving a total committee membership of 9, we would still be quorate if only 3 members were present. This means that we could effectively carry out the business of Torfaen U3A with a reduced committee structure.

1.3 Co-opted members

The Constitution (6, iii) also allows us to co-opt **2 further members** to serve until the next AGM should the need arise. This would allow us to fill any vacancies arising from ill-health or other causes.

1.4 Non-officer roles

In order to give the non-officer members more of a stake on the committee we may consider distributing some duties amongst them. Two of our non-officer members already have formal roles; the **Speaker Secretary** (Margaret) and the **Registrar of Assets** (Sheila). In the past our Vice-Chair (Kath) has attempted to act as co-ordinator for the group convenors. We might consider resurrecting this role. In addition, our Treasurer (Ruth) holds the role of **Membership Secretary**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Reduce the committee membership to 9 (5 officers and 4 non-officers).**
2. **Distribute the roles of Membership Secretary and Convenor Coordinator amongst the non-officer members**

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2. Length of Service

2.1 Normal service

The Constitution (7, iii) states that both officers and non-officer members alike shall serve for a period of 2 years. At the end of this period the **Chairman** and **Vice-Chairman** cannot be re-elected to those particular roles until the following year. However, the retiring Vice-Chairman could be elected to the role of Chairman and vice versa. In addition, there is nothing in the Constitution to prohibit either the retiring Chairman or Vice-Chair from being elected to some other officer or non-officer role, if nominated.

There is no restriction on the election of the other officers (**Business Secretary, Committee Secretary, and Treasurer**) and theoretically these positions could be held by the same individuals indefinitely, as long as they were duly nominated and elected at successive AGMs. Non-officer members, if duly nominated and elected, may also serve indefinitely.

2.2 Vacancies arising during any year

The constitution does not state that committee members, whether officers or otherwise, have to serve for their full term. In practice it is likely that, in almost all cases, elected committee members would do so. However, there may be circumstances (ill-health, family problems, etc) that would make it necessary for an individual to resign their committee position.

The Constitution (6, ii, v) allows for any vacancies, either officer or non-officer, that arise in this way to be filled from the membership, when they would serve until the next AGM.

3. Election of committee members

The Constitution allows us 2 years between AGMs before we need to consider replacing the committee as a whole. We therefore have until **February 2018** before we need go through another election process.

In Torfaen U3A we have re-elected the entire committee at successive AGMs. This leads us to question whether this is a wise way to proceed. Historically we have had difficulty in raising any interest in attracting U3A members onto the committee and, on one notable occasion, Jan Hardy had to make an impassioned plea for volunteers at an AGM in order to keep Torfaen U3A in business. If we continue to elect the entire committee at one go we potentially risk this happening again.

Several solutions might be possible in future, including:

1. The officers could be re-elected one year and the non-officer members re-elected the following year.
2. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman could be re-elected one year, together with 2 or 3 non-officer members, and the Business Secretary, Committee Secretary, and Treasurer the next, together with the remainder of the non-officer members.

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NOTE: The first occasion on which either of these options was applied would result in some members not serving their full 2 year term. **This would necessitate a change to the Constitution (7 (iii))**. After that first year the natural cycles would re-establish themselves.

Replacement of individual committee members owing to resignation, ill-health, etc could continue to be carried out at the first convenient AGM.

RECOMMENDATION

That we continue with full elections on a 2-year cycle as at present and consider changing the Constitution at some later date

4. Nominations to the Committee

4.1 Inclusivity

At this year's AGM on February 11th, a motion was passed that required the committee to examine ways by which the procedure for nominating committee members could be made more inclusive. Here are some options:

1. Each existing group could be asked to nominate one or more of its participants.
2. U3A members could be encouraged to provide nominees each month via both the general meeting and the newsletter.
3. Committee members could proactively seek nominations from within the wider membership if and when necessary.
4. A combination of all the above.

RECOMMENDATION

That we use all the above methods, together with any others that might come to mind.

4.2 Timetable

In order to maximise the opportunity of collecting nominations it would be prudent to begin the process as early as practically convenient. A possible time table could be:

The nomination period to begin with nomination forms being included in the September newsletter

1. Each successive newsletter up to, and including, December to continue to include nomination forms.
2. The Chairman to request U3A members to provide nominations at each general meeting up to, and including, January. Copies of nomination forms could be made available at each of these meetings.
3. The nomination period to be closed at the general meeting in January.
4. The January newsletter to contain a list of all nominees, together with the committee positions for which they are nominated. This will give members around 2 weeks to consider the nominees in preparation for any voting at the February AGM.

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5. Voting procedure

To date we have been fortunate in that the low level of nominations has meant that the nominees have been returned unopposed year upon year. While there is no good reason to suppose that this is likely to change in the foreseeable future, we still need to be prepared for the eventuality that it might.

Our membership is changing, younger people are joining us and these may very well be more prepared to stand for the committee. We may, therefore, face the possibility of more than one person being nominated for a particular committee position. This would require a vote to select the person to fill the post, whether that is an officer or non-officer role.

Advice Sheet 13 (Standing Orders) states that voting in all contested elections can only be carried out by secret ballot. This protects the privacy of the voter and depersonalises the risk of embarrassment to the losing nominee. It does however require more planning. Ballot forms would need to be made available; a ballot box would have to be set up, and vote counters appointed together with a scrutinizer to ensure fair practice. The Advice Sheet further states that two tellers should be appointed at the start of the AGM to count the votes.

RECOMMENDATION

That we devise a workable voting process to be used in the eventuality of a contested election.