

Your Questions from the Third Age Trust AGM 2023

Third Age Matters

Who do I contact if members don't receive their TAM?

The correct process would be to double check the spreadsheet data that was uploaded to the TAM submission portal.

If the addresses are correct, then please email us at tam.support@u3a.org.uk

We pick up queries to that email address in Zendesk.

Why are TAM postage charges based on assumed numbers in advance and corrected with rebates or additions later rather charging actual figure at the year end, saving work?

Currently the basis of charging for TAM is based on the number that u3as self declare at the end of the year. During the year some u3a members drop out and some new members take the magazine resulting in end of year rebates or charges. The charges are made in advance so that we can pay for distribution of TAM.

If members are paying only distribution costs, could we please shift to online distribution to both save the planet and bring ourselves more up to date. This ought to help us give better value for money to members? All that said, I am not suggesting we drop the paper magazine altogether because we must stay fully inclusive and present through all channels.

Thank you, we will be undertaking a refresh of TAM having undertaken a survey to ask members what they would like to see in TAM going forward. We are also investigating a digital TAM. We agree that we should not be digital by default.

I have seen TAM online - will this reduce your income? Am I right in thinking the u3a is invoiced £3.60 for each TAM magazine sent out? And it foots the bill rather than the individual?

The online magazine is a screen reader version purely for people who have visual support requirements. A digital version is being discussed currently along with its potential impact on the paper version. We will update u3as on the digital version as this project is explored further. The £3.60 covers the cost of 5 copies distribution and this is paid by individuals who wish to take the magazine or as part of a membership fee if your u3a includes TAM within it.

A number of our members have decided not to continue with TAM. This is largely because of cost of living rises. Has this been factored into the Budget?

The costs for TAM relate to the overall volume contract costs for print, distribution, mail sort, and editorial of TAM to the current readership of 190,000. The budget is built from these contract costs.

When did the cost of Third Age Matters go up to £3.60? I became Treasurer of my u3a in June and was told by the previous treasurer that the price of TAM was £3.35.

The cost of receiving 5 copies of TAM a year is £3.60. This is increased each year in line with the increased distribution costs from the distributors.

This message was sent to all u3as on 8th January 2023. "As you know, the Third Age Matters Magazine (TAM) charge is reviewed each year in line with increases in distribution (including Royal Mail charges) and other related TAM costs.

Throughout 2022 we assessed and renegotiated our relationships with TAM's key suppliers; namely our printers, our distribution company and our advertising sales agency. Despite this, and as a direct result of inflationary pressures, the cost of printing and distribution have increased by around 10%. In order for TAM to remain a viable proposition, to be enjoyed by members, the Committee has agreed (with delegated powers from the Trading Company – TATTL Board) a small increase in the annual TAM charge for 2023; from £3.35 to £3.60, representing an increase of 5p per copy, or about 7%; to take effect from April 2023."

Finance

It would be helpful to see areas that are all or partially self funding separated out so that we can see what we pay our membership fees for. Can these slides (particularly finance) be made available after the AGM for me to use with my Committee?

Those areas that are partially funded include Beacon, TAM and CLA Licences. The Treasurers slides will be on [the AGM page of the website](#) very soon.

I think the Auditors have changed Goodman Jones LLP replacing Haysmacintyre LLP – any particular reason for that? Or just evolution?

Haysmacintyre advised us that they were changing their market position and hence stopping offering their services to Charities, particularly small ones. While we complained about this we had to accept and look for new Auditors.

We went out for competitive bids and a sub team from the Finance Committee supported by Staff members shortlisted, then interviewed, then awarded a new contract to Goodman Jones.

Their submitted price was slightly under last year's cost from Haysmacintyre.

When you say no need to increase membership fees for the next few years, does this mean capitation fee will not increase from the current £4 per member?

We don't call it 'capitation fee' these days, instead we call it Membership Subscription. But yes that was the £4 per member that I was referring to. It was under the Forecasting session I was showing that, although last year's AGM we thought we would have to increase Membership Subscriptions, inflation hadn't hit as hard as we expected, expenditure was lower (than Planned) last year and therefore depending on a number of lookahead assumptions, we forecast that we wouldn't need a Membership Subscription increase until 2026/27. Even this could change and the Board will be keeping this under review, not just annually but at each Quarter.

Having reserves of £2.1m looks very healthy but what plans do we have to make use of them to benefit u3a's and members?

Yes, as you say, over the pandemic period where our activities, our expenditure, was low we have indeed built up a healthy level of reserves, well above the minimum required by the Charity Commission. We intend now to hold our income, our membership subscription level, to £4.00 per member for the short term. Whereas our expenditure level per year is planned to be above our level. Therefore, our reserves level will slowly reduce over the next few years.

The specific expenditure areas this year (2023/24) were presented at the recent AGM and the relevant Budget sheet is also on the website. In summary our key areas of expenditure will be: member support (responding to queries submitted by u3as); general support to u3as (for Complaints, legal guidance, workshops for post holders, etc), insurance and licences, development projects (including digital projects to support our Digital Strategy), publicity (supporting the approved AGM resolution of membership growth), etc. Overall our expenditure is to achieve our strategic aims of growing our membership (by raising our national profile and recruiting younger members) and providing a wide enjoyable learning platform.

We hope this provides sufficient detail to your question.

Grants

The Third Age Trust have cut the Grant to new startups, to only cover pre Inaugural expenses. Why is this and can the level of the Grant (as per previous definition) be increased to reflect increase costs for new u3as?

Start ups in the pandemic were not possible and have only really been able to recommence this year. Membership of the u3a was down generally in the pandemic and while numbers are recovering now, growth is not at pre-pandemic levels, in terms of new u3as or members.

All start ups are provided with up to £300 to help them start. On top of that we provide funding for two Trust Volunteers to help guide them through this process. This can

include meeting costs, travel costs and other expenses and we also provide a pack of publicity materials which includes leaflets and posters for local promotion. To date, no start up has needed more than this to get their u3a started and the cost of several have come in under this amount. However, in response to feedback we are currently reviewing whether we should offer a grant of £300 total to all u3as, in addition to the publicity pack and the volunteer support. We are also reviewing the Trust membership fee and the TAM cost for u3as in the first few months, although any changes would need to be approved by the Board, prior to roll out.

Membership Age

If we look to lower the age of average member are we not in danger of being a competitor to say WEA (Workers Education Association) ?

The Trust is encouraging anyone who is not in fulltime work and who supports the ethos and guiding principles of the movement to join. In practice this is likely to be mainly retired people. We work closely with the WEA and feel that both organisations complement each other rather than compete with each other.

"Age profile in most u3as is increasing." How do we know? How could we improve our knowledge about our own members without invading members privacy?

We have undertaken randomised anonymous research with u3a members every 10 years. This is done statistically to remove as much bias as possible with the results. There is interest amongst the membership for this to be undertaken more often, and it is being considered for the 2024 workplan.

The name u3a

One thing which came up recently at a region link meeting was around what the "u3a" is becoming in terms of identity. Originating as "University of the Third Age" we are now just "u3a" which seems to stand for not a lot? How do we understand and preserve our distinctiveness?

This is a question that is frequently raised. When we were first formed, it was in the wake of the French Universite de Troisieme Age, which had strong links with universities and operated similarly to extra-mural departments in many UK universities. Our founders chose a different model, focusing on learning from each other. Although this was based on the original meaning of 'university', for many centuries universities have been recognised as institutions of higher education awarding degrees. When we roll the clock forward to the rebranding in 2020 one of the drivers was the reports from members that the word 'university' put off many potential members who did not consider themselves clever enough, or who felt they did not qualify for membership as they had not been to university. The vision of our founders of the u3a as 'older people organising their own educational activities' was not evident in the name. It was also recognised that for many u3a members it was the social aspects of meeting together that were as important as the learning.



So u3a means meeting with other people to share experiences and knowledge while enjoying each other's company and learning together, sometimes formally and often informally. Although some people feel the need to explain u3a as an acronym, it is better to think of it as a name.

Arguably our distinctiveness is that u3a members learn from each other, rather than being taught by experts who are employed to teach.

Digital Strategy

What is the £ budget set aside for the digital strategy?

£10,000.

This was very much a rough estimate as at the time (January 2023) there hadn't been much scoping of specific digital projects.

SiteWorks and Beacon

We currently use an independent web hosting provider together with SimpleMembership. Therefore we do not need Siteworks or Beacon. Can you assure us that we will not be required to contribute to the cost of Siteworks and Beacon?

Beacon is charged to those u3as that use Beacon. SiteWorks will be free to those that use it until March 2025. After that it will be charged at about £50 per u3a.

What is siteworks?

SiteWorks is a WordPress based website for u3as to use. It will replace Sitebuilder. SiteWorks is led by the SiteWorks Team who are Trust volunteers being u3a dedicated members and link into the Digital Information Officer. SiteWorks will be supported by the SiteWorks Team.

How much extra is the developed Siteworks likely to cost, per u3a or per member?

The cost will be per u3a. There is no charge until 1st April 2025, from this point it is likely to be £50 a year.

Beacon was seen as an obsolete system that needed replacing. It was written in old code that was difficult to support and that code was poorly structured. Why have we continued to invest in it?

Beacon has been substantially upgraded and is settled and working well and liked by the u3as that use it.

Beacon profit is forecast to increase from £31k in 22/3 to £60k next year. 356 u3as now use the system, with more joining each month at £1/member fee paid by those who join. When will unit fee reduce, seeing as overhead costs are fixed (there are no additional costs per u3a using the system)?

The budgeted gross profit for Beacon was £54k in 22/23 and £55k in 23/24, so there has been no material change and there are presently 556 groups using Beacon.

We feel that the charges for Beacon are of a fair and realistic level as:

that the support costs and development costs continue
that the potential link to SiteWorks need to be costed
there may be the need to add in some paid support if the lead volunteers need assistance or wish to reduce their considerable hours.

There are currently no plans to amend the charges for Beacon.

Link to budget paper with figures: <https://www.u3a.org.uk/component/edocman/third-age-trust-budget-2023-24/download?Itemid=>

Merchandise

When will the merchandise on the branding centre website be updated?

The merchandising and branding centre (<https://u3abrand.org.uk/>) is under review. Access to the system is also being reviewed to make the experience easier for u3a members. We will keep members informed of progress.

Council and Networks

With the new Council, what will be the role of the networks?

The pilot Council currently has the Chair of Network Link and two additional network representatives included. Their role is to link back to Networks for feedback via Network Link for views, thoughts and agenda items.

AGM Recording

Will the AGM be available to view online after the meeting?

A fully captioned video of the AGM is available on [the u3a YouTube channel](#). This includes separate videos of the Digital Strategy, Fit for the Future and Strategy for the Movement videos.

The u3a off the wall film, shown at the beginning of the AGM, is also available on [the u3a YouTube channel](#).

The draft minutes will be approved by the Board and will then be available on [the AGM page of the u3a website](#). We do not produce a separate verbatim word document.

Affinity Scheme

On the Affinity scheme. Who if anyone monitors the prices?

As part of the contractual relationship the supplier monitors pricing closely on our behalf to ensure that the providers' price promises. We are working with a supplier that specialises in getting good deals for membership associations. They will review prices and deals on our behalf. Also, they will occasionally introduce new offers and service partners. We are pleased to be able to make these benefits available to Friends of u3a.

Festival

Please put the summary info about the festival – dates, costs, what on offer – up again.

We really have tried to keep costs down so you can see here what we think the costs will be.

Single B&B rooms at £54 per night

Then the Festival rates for

Day 1 are £25 to include dinner – that's the only meal included, all other meals etc are payable by members

Day 2 which is a full day £10

Day 3 is a half day and that is £5

Or if you are coming for all 3 days the total will be £35.

All the information is on [the Festival page of the u3a website.](#)

u3a office

Have you considered moving your headquarters to another area of the country to save on office costs and to make staff recruitment easier?

Yes there is an exercise every few years to identify these costs given the level of interest in the question amongst the members. Currently the building we use is a serviced office with a licence. This allows us to be flexible with long term decision making. We have 14 desk spaces – and these are shared by 22.5 FTE staff. The recruitment pool is larger in London due to the transport links out to Essex, Kent, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

How many u3a office staff are working from home?

All fulltime staff must come into the office two or more days a week, all part time staff must come in 1 or more days a week. We have 14 functioning desks and 22 members of staff.

Miscellaneous Questions

In relation to the trust & the interview with Margaret F & John, isn't the term 400.000 members misleading? Aren't the members of the Trust the 1000 plus u3as rather than the 400,000 members of individual u3as many of whom are charities in their own right?

That is correct, the members of the Trust are the u3as. We do have contact from individuals within each u3a. more often than not committee members holding different positions that need advice or support or group co-ordinators. Most other u3a individuals contact us regarding online learning.

There is a suggestion being made that the centre is trying to take control and reduce the automatous nature of individual u3a groups. What does the board think and why is this impression being given?

The Trust respects and encourages the operationally independent u3as. There is no intention to change that.

Sometimes u3a are concerned about the advice sent out to support u3as. The advice provided to u3as is for the most part solely advice to deal with a range of difficult situations as well as providing model policies for you to use. As charities the charity commission(s) expect all charities to act within their Charity Commission guidance. You may decide locally to do some things in a different way – but the outcome should still meet charity commission requirements.