

# NETWORK LINK MEETING - 1 May 2018

THE WESLEY EUSTON CONFERENCE CENTRE, EUSTON STREET, LONDON NW1 2EZ

The meeting was chaired by Ian McCannah, Trust Vice Chair and more than 40 Networks/Neighbourhood Groups/Regions, etc ("Networks") were represented. There were 14 members of the National Executive Committee present together with four members of staff.

These minutes have been prepared with the assistance of Jane Pavier.

The meeting contained a number of slide presentations that will be sent to all delegates.

## 1 Results of the Networks Questionnaire

Fifty-five Networks out of a possible 75 completed the Questionnaire. This is a very high response rate. It is still open for late responders. The average size of a Network is 16 with numbers of U3A members ranging from 3 to 100. The results indicated a wide variety of the ways that Networks are organised. 61% do not have a website, 66% do not consider a constitution to be necessary, only 10% are registered charities, and only about 40% have bank accounts.

The results of the questionnaire will be sent to delegates.

Networks provide a forum for U3As to meet and share ideas, arrange study days, share interest groups, plan shared learning projects, establish links with outside organisations, etc.

There was a suggestion that a Network website/forum be set up so that Networks can talk to each other, provide useful information, ask for advice, etc. This is possible but it would require a Trust approved moderator to ensure that any advice was consistent and accurate. If there was to be a forum it would need to be initiated by NL members.

A comment was made that it was hard to demonstrate to U3As the value of Networks. They are often informal, and vary in size due to local interest or geography. Whether or not U3As join a Network is the decision of their committee

## 2. National Programme Of Workshops / Trust Volunteers

Sophie Wellings, Advice and Volunteer Manager, listed the national workshops which can be delivered on request by a team of trained volunteers. These are *Keeping It Legal*, *Running Your U3A*, *Managing Growth*, *Interest Groups Matter*, *Communication*, *Finance* and *Recruiting Volunteers*.

Networks or groups of U3As wishing to commission a workshop should contact their Regional Trustee or Sophie Wellings. Bespoke workshops can be designed if requested. The finance workshops will be carried out by members of the finance team.

There are now 200 National Volunteers, covering research, shared learning projects, Beacon, running workshops, troubleshooting and launching new U3As. They are all trained so there is consistency in their advice. Role descriptions for interested volunteers are available from Sophie.

## 3 Why Are Requests for Half Day Training / Education Workshops Denied?

There is no reason why these should be denied, provided that they involve some form of learning conforming to the U3A ethos. Networks should approach their Regional Trustee re

funding.

On the topic of the level of reserves held by U3As, John Ellison, Trust Treasurer, stated that holding significant amounts of members' money cannot be justified, either in U3As or Networks, and if there is a large balance, members are entitled to query it. Ways to address the excess include reducing membership subscriptions, purchasing equipment that would benefit members in various groups, etc. Money must not be refunded to members. Whilst some reserves are necessary, and account should be taken in the budget for inflation, it would be hard to justify them being more than six months of expenditure. It should be remembered that charitable funds are publically available to members or non-members.

#### 4 **Why So Much Paperwork From National Office?**

Although U3As are operationally independent, they are subject to UK legislation. Over recent years there has been an increase in legislation that affect U3As – Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, Equality, Disability, Data Protection, etc. The Trust has a duty to provide advice to its members in these areas.

Information to Business Secretaries now goes out by email, unless there is a legal requirement for paper copies e.g information about AGM's, insurance documents, etc.

Some of the advice in the paper Committee Reference File was not up-to-date. Up to date advice is now on the national website and U3As are recommended to check when they require information.

The Online Office Newsletter is sent to all chairmen and business secretaries and any ordinary member who registers to receive it. Delegates were encouraged to sign up as it is a source of up-to-date information.

The Sources magazine, which currently goes out as a paper copy three times a year, is to be replaced by Sources Online ([sources.org.uk](http://sources.org.uk)) next Spring. The last three paper copies will include the following themes - subject advisers, summer schools and shared learning contacts. Items previously in paper Sources will appear in TAM or Sources Online next year. The next issue of Sources will provide the reasoning for the decision to go online.

Networks chairs/contacts asked for copies of all the information sent to U3As. The National Office mailings can be obtained from 'Downloads' on the National Office website and is available for all members to access.

It was agreed that the editor of TAM would be invited to the next NL meeting.

In reply to a comment about the number of advertisements in TAM, it was pointed out that the percentage varied between 40 / 45% per issue. Advertising kept the cost of TAM down to members. The magazine is delivered to homes and if it went online advertisers would be reluctant to place adverts.

#### 5 **Data Protection Issues**

The new General Data Protection Regulations come into force on 25th May. There is guidance on the National Office website.

#### 6 **How Do Attendees See Their Role – is it mainly as a communication link or does it also involve giving advice?**

Many Networks have no constitution and no bank account and often no agenda for their

meetings. All Networks are different depending on what their members want. They consider themselves to be a group of like-minded people coming together to share what is happening in U3As, how to deal with problems and pass on good practice. Trustees are often asked for advice at these meetings.

Sharing of information is important and NL meetings can be an important part of this process. Some Networks leaders see their role as encouraging U3As to talk to each other, but others consider themselves to be the person who sets the agenda for meetings and manages the Network

Not all Networks have their own website. It is important that U3As know what their Networks do. Auriol Ainley, West Midlands Regional Trustee, has a tri-fold network leaflet which could be updated. It was agreed to produce a revised tri-fold for the next NL meeting for discussion / agreement.

## 7 **Status of U3A Groupings / Charity Status / Charity Commission Thresholds**

**A small number of networks have a constitution that includes the Trust / Charity Commission approved Objects Clause. Whether they realise it or not, this makes them a charity in the eyes of the CC. If their income is over £5,000 they should register as a charity with the CC. If their income is over £10,000 they should send their accounts to the CC. If over £25,000 their accounts should be audited.**

**Ian mentioned that the Trust's new Articles of Association allow for new categories of membership. Consideration is being given to a new membership category for U3A groupings. Membership would be entirely at the groupings discretion. If a new category was created, a template Network constitution would be produced for use by networks applying for membership.**

Some Networks have Guidelines rather than a constitution. A constitution is normally required if a bank account is required.

It is not recommended that one U3A holds the finances of a Network as part of its own accounts, as that money then becomes the responsibility of that U3A's trustees.

Networks must adhere to the Guiding Principles of the movement. The Public Liability Insurance follows U3A members so Networks are covered.

## 8 **How Do Networks Communicate With The U3As in Their Groupings?**

Some Networks have websites and some have newsletters. E-mail contact should be by blind copy to keep members' details private.

## 9 **Template For Network Constitution**

Ian has received copies of constitutions from some Networks and work will begin on putting together a template that could be used by Networks not registering as a charity, if they wish.

## 10 **Should the Network Link Meetings Be Split Between Urban and Rural Groupings**

Discussion was held on how the future meetings could be run - should they be split into urban and rural Networks? This would be difficult as how would the decision be made as to which is which?

The decision was taken not to split, but breakout sessions could be arranged in the future.

11 **What is the Office Structure and Who Does What?**

Sam Mauger, CEO, distributed an office organisation chart. She thanked the staff for the many ways in which they help provide assistance to U3As.

Thanks were expressed to National Office for Youtube-ing the AGM and the EGM.

12 **Any Other Business**

- Pam Jones, Chairman, said plans are in place to raise our profile through a report on the impact of life-long learning groups. There is to be an event at the House of Commons on 10<sup>th</sup> July to launch the report to people who have influence. Anyone with ideas of who could be invited should pass their names to Pam.
- The Development Sub Committee is looking at ways in which we can grow the movement sustainably and sensibly. A meeting has been arranged for 6<sup>th</sup> June to discuss this with interested parties.
- The Virtual U3A now has 80 members. It was set up to encourage members who can no longer go to U3A meetings and people who live in remote areas to be part of the U3A movement.
- Strategic Plan. Earlier this year, Ian had asked network contacts for their submissions re the Trust's SP. A number of proposals have been received. If networks wish to submit their suggestions these should be received as soon as possible.

13 **Summing Up And Vote On The Next NL Venue (Autumn 2018)**

Delegates considered the meeting to be a useful opportunity for discussions with other Network leaders. It was agreed to have a further meeting. After two rounds of voting it was agreed that the next NL meeting would be in London, in October. Now confirmed as Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October.

A vote of thanks was expressed for Ian for organising the event and to everyone for attending.