

SUMMARY OF POINTS RAISED DURING TWO “EFFECTIVE COMMITTEE” WORKSHOPS – U3A Conference 2018, Nottingham

The following points were raised / discussed / suggested by attendees at the two Workshops – in no particular order!

- what is the purpose of a U3A Committee? – it includes making decisions, ensuring that proceedings are in accordance with the constitution and ensuring that it follows Trust advice and guidance re Charity Commission requirements (CC3 in England and Wales and the equivalent in NI and Scotland) and UK legislation.

- trustee induction. Before prospective members join the Committee, they are made aware of their roles and duties as a trustee of a charity. Hold a new Committee Member (CM) induction session covering the role / responsibilities of a Trustee, the U3A constitution, confidentiality / data protection, safeguarding / equality / disability policies, the Advice Section on the Trust’s website, etc. Each year the Trustees to sign a “code of conduct / practice”.

- Strategic Planning. Once a year, hold a meeting to produce a rolling three year term plan covering committee succession, membership growth, etc.

- to streamline the work of the Committee, and to reduce the workload on members, create sub-Committees (e.g. social, governance, publicity etc) and ad hoc Working Groups on specific subjects. This will broaden the base of the membership managing the U3A as well as drawing on specific expertise that may not exist on the main Committee.

- have a “STARS” arrangement – Special Tasks as Required. Form a “Really Useful Group” to assist the Committee – preparing halls for Monthly Meetings / AGMs, mailing items to members, help at social events, etc.

- produce role descriptions for each committee position. They can be provided to members considering specific Committee positions. (Contact the Trust for templates for key positions or create your own).

- help to ensure Committee succession by arranging for all / key roles to have a “shadow” who may assume the position at a later date. Invite members to attend, but not participate in, Committee meetings.

- sensitive issues, on the agenda, are left until the end of the meeting. The subsequent minutes, available to the membership, exclude sensitive points / decisions.

- all CMs to have a role, except for one member who is “member without portfolio” to be given ad hoc jobs. Do not have more than one member who does not have a role.

- limit Committee meetings to two hours. Allocate a set number of minutes to each agenda item. (there can be flexibility within this timing but it helps to keep the members focussed on the matter being discussed.)

- require all agenda items, such as the Treasurer’s and Membership Secretary’s reports, to be supported in writing. In order to reduce discussion during the meeting, all papers to be sent to members at least one week beforehand.

- ensure that all CMs talk through the Chair, not to one another! Make sure that all members are given the chance to express their views and that there is not a dominant member, including the Chair!

- if not already in use, adopt the current U3A Model Constitution. This Constitution puts fixed terms of office for Officers and CMs. Although some U3As are reluctant to adopt fixed terms, because of the difficulty of replacing existing members, evidence suggests that fixed terms ensure regular succession and “new blood” joining the Committee

- contact major supermarkets for details of meeting rooms. Asda, Tesco, Sainsburys, Waitrose, etc often have “community rooms” that they make available, free of charge, to local charities, etc.

- split the Secretary role in two – the Minutes Secretary (sets the meeting agenda with the Chair) and a Business Secretary (deals with incoming mail from the Trust, etc). This may reduce the workload of the Secretary and make the position more attractive.

- do not have a standard agenda for each meeting as it can make discussion too rigid. Have certain items on the agenda every other meeting, thereby allowing more time for discussion of policy / strategic issues.

- in order for Committee members to stay in touch with the “grass roots”, arrange for them to attend, on an occasional basis, interest group meetings. Arrange for a members “drop in” centre, say on a Saturday, attended by Committee members on a rota basis. At monthly meetings, hold a ten minute Q & A session with the members.

.....- identify potential new Committee Members by a variety of initiatives – regular new members meetings, once a year hold a meeting for members that joined either two / three / four / five years ago. These meetings may identify members who are willing to take on a role in running the U3A

- suggestions for recruiting new CMs – committee members to approach likely candidates in the interest groups that they belong to (walking groups were felt to be fertile ground), appoint a new members secretary and have a new members desk at the monthly meeting.

- make contact with neighbouring U3As via Networks, Links, Clusters, etc. By meeting informally with other U3As ideas can be shared, including names of Speakers, ways to address organisational issues, etc.

- be familiar with the Advice Section on the U3A national website – www.u3a.org.uk

- use the expertise available from your Regional Trustee / National Office staff, particularly with insurance, equality / disability discrimination issues, etc.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss any of the above points.

Ian McCannah

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