

Connect

West Midlands Region

Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire.

OCTOBER 2024

u3a learn,
laugh,
live



In our West Midlands Regional newsletters I'd like to celebrate the u3as' achievements and let us share things that will help u3a groups to thrive. If you have things to include, email me:

Jean.jackson@u3a.org.uk.

Our expert editorial team, John and Margaret Aston, usually create our newsletter but as I've left it far too late to send them copy, I've done this myself, so you can look forward to improvements in the New Year!

The main thing occupying me at present is attending my daughter's wedding in Perth, Australia, and planning her next wedding (to the same person) in the UK in May. As he only proposed mid-August, this

has been a rush. Currently I'm visiting as many u3as as I can, and I've created a new Regional website, in SiteWorks, which is much easier than SiteBuilder.



Welcome to the u3a West Midlands Region



Networks are listed on the website but few have active links: if there's one to be added, let me know.

The other handy thing to mention is that in [Resources](#) I highlight a **FREE IT helpline for us all – whether you use a PC, ipad or phone.**

The Helpline is from AbilityNet, a charity that helps older people navigate the digital world.

In September, u3a members & I went with Moira Stewart, the ex-newsreader who now presents on Classic FM, to Blenheim Palace on a FREE trip funded by BT, where we also found out how to avoid digital scams. Moira fell victim to one, so that's something she feels strongly about. Read more [here](#) and see our picture below: it was a lovely day, gloriously sunny, our afternoon tea was excellent, and we learned something, too.



Thank you to all the u3as who have hosted me over the past months: 2 weeks ago, I managed to meet people from 40 u3as in one week, due to attending 2 network meetings plus 4 “single” u3as. In the New Year, I’m happy to visit your u3a, update you with what’s happening and find out what you’d like me to help with. I don’t presume to know all the answers but I can usually find someone who does!

I will be away for the [Trust AGM on 16 October](#), when the proposal to change the structure of u3a is voted upon. Personally I think that u3a needs change: there is difficulty recruiting Regional Trustees, and my fellow Trustees believe that what u3as think and need is not given enough attention at Board level. We hope the proposal will overcome that by recruiting a smaller Board from candidates UK-wide, and having a Council where each Region has 2 Representatives.

However, we need 75% of the votes cast to be in favour of this if it’s to pass, so it’s anyone’s guess what the outcome will be. Also at the AGM, our new CEO, [Iain Cassidy](#), will take over from Sam Mauger, who’s run the Trust for the last 8 years. No doubt it will be a time of change, whatever the vote decides.



Which brings me to the pressing need for a Regional team, and for more u3as to collaborate in Networks! See details below – I hope you’ll consider taking up the offer of a FREE lunch & meeting talented people in a Regional team. The immediate task is to help to plan our CEO’s visit to the Region next year.

I return from Australia in November, and after the Board Meeting on Wed 4 December, the very next day, Thursday 5 Dec, I hope to see many of you at a [Regional Zoom](#) – open to all, where we’ll catch up with the news. I’ve even put a meeting in for [January!](#) See the Region website for more details – and for information about other events.

As I find things out, I’ll update the Region website. Sorry there’s been no newsletters over the summer, but that will change once things settle down – I hope!

Jean Jackson, u3a West Midlands Region Trustee;

Jean.jackson@u3a.org.uk; 07310 183428 (*don’t call until end of Nov!*)

What does the Regional Team do?

The Regional team meets via Zoom at least quarterly; this is likely to increase to monthly, as it’s clear that we’ll never get a date that suits everyone. We will meet in person at some point.

If the AGM proposals for a Council go through, then we’ll need a team to advise and guide the new Representative about what needs to be explored by the Council, what actions they should take on our behalf. If they don’t, your Trustee still needs to know what’s going on so that common problems can be fixed, and u3as can help each other more easily.

I think we can make more use of the Region website now, & so I’d really like another Webmaster. Frances Kilburn is Assistant Webmaster, and has guided me expertly through the SiteWorks process, but we could do with someone else too.

As a team, our immediate task is to plan the CEO’s visit in April/May next year; Why? What? Where? How? To get it right, we need your opinion and your help.

Join me please – if you can;t make that date, I’m happy to talk or Zoom on another day.

Thurs 5 Dec, 3pm-4:30: [Regional Zoom Meeting - u3a West Midlands Region \(u3asite.uk\)](#)

Would you like a free lunch?

Well, of course we know there's (almost) no such thing! What other Regions do, to encourage their networks or clusters of u3as to talk to each other and perhaps collaborate, is fund "networking lunches." I'm delighted to say that we had such a thing in Coventry, at the Hearsall Golf Club, and everyone appeared to enjoy it (great lunch!) and feel that it was useful. We heard about the Solihull Cluster, and I updated people about what's going on in u3a, most notably about the AGM Resolution. My heartfelt thanks go to **Pippa Richings**, who did a splendid job of organising the meeting.

If your u3a either isn't in a network or they've not met for a while, how about suggesting a networking lunch? It's surprising what you find out.

Your Trustee will fund a modest lunch – I was amazed Pippa managed to get us chips, at that price – and we will get some ideas and information and useful contacts to take back "home." Contact me.

PLEASE CHECK YOUR [NETWORK DETAILS](#) ON THE REGION'S WEBSITE

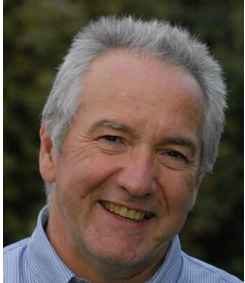
At the Coventry meeting, various questions were asked: 3 in particular:

1. How long can someone be a u3a Trustee (i.e. serve on the committee)
 2. What is the u3a's position about paying people as speakers, and to run groups?
 3. Could music groups share a Regional access to music?
1. If you sign onto the Members area of the national website, you can find out all about constitutions: [Constitutions \(u3a.org.uk\)](#). The relevant part of the Model Constitution is: *The maximum total period of service of any trustee shall be 9 years in any combination of roles whether or not the periods of service are contiguous. (8) No-one may hold any specific officer position or be an ordinary (non-officer) trustee for a continuous period in excess of 3 years without an interval of at least 1 year between the periods of service*
- BUT if your members agree, you can vote to change this aspect of your constitution and advise the Trust accordingly. It's up to your u3a to decide, not the Trust.
2. There is nothing in the [Policies section](#) of the national website that fully explains this. The custom and practice is that if you're a u3a member, you should not seek payment for giving your services to u3a. I think we need to adopt a pragmatic approach: what works for your u3a is what's important. I know that exercise groups, for example (Tai Chi, Aerobics, etc) often employ a tutor which enables them to offer the group at low cost to u3a members. I've come across a large History group (60+) who employ a lecturer.
- Provided that we maintain "self-help" as our key principle, I don't think the odd deviation from that will break us.
3. This last one I put to the "Let's Talk Tech" team on Facebook! The problem is that CDs are going out of fashion, so how does a music group share and access music? A Spotify or similar account might be handy... could this be done regionally? The logistics seem to be against it: there's one login, and it would be unfair (to the provider) and impractical to share it over such a wide area. If just one member of the group has online access to music, perhaps they could share with others? It wouldn't cost them any extra.

Recruiting new members – while learning about IT?

AbilityNet offer [FREE IT sessions for the over-55s](#): why not invite people and then recruit them to u3a? Ask anyone who went to Blenheim - the “scams” presentation was excellent.

Learn more about Ai



You may know that there's a very evangelical ai group convened by the national AI Subject Adviser, [Barry Claydon](#), but you might not know about the library of ai information or that we have a member of that team based in Shrewsbury, who can talk to u3a groups. He (pictured opposite) is our very own [Terry Lowrie-Herz](#). Contact him if you want help with Ai. ...

Ai's gone from theoretical to practical: a u3a member who's also a Rambler contacted me to see whether ai might speed up the Ramblers' project called “Don't Lose your Way”, which aims to reclaim lost rights of way, and we managed to put them in touch with a set of university ai experts who are helping them free of charge.

Malvern u3a “Third Agers” team Star on [Only Connect](#)



On 23 Sept a team from Malvern did their bit to publicise u3a – while starring in the quiz show “Only Connect.” Great sales job – Victoria Coren-Mitchell said she might join! Well done Malvern u3a!

AND FINALLY: the No1 issue most u3as have is a lack of committee members

I do sympathise! The best advice I can give is remember to learn LAUGH and live: if you can make (at least some) of your committee meetings FUN, recruitment might be easier.

One u3a I know puts its success down to high-quality cake. I wish I could deliver that via Zoom. But I will be mindful of my own advice when recruiting a Regional team!

I hope to see many of you on [Thursday 5 December, 3pm-4:30](#) (latecomers welcome)

I will have visited at least one u3a in Perth WA by then, so I will report back.

Happy Hallowe'en!

Jean Jackson

Trustee, u3a West Midlands Region

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