

Connect

West Midlands Region

Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire.

u3a learn,
laugh,
live

APRIL ISSUE 2021

Spring is now well advanced (but it seems like the weather didn't get the message) and thankfully we can even see light at the end of the Covid tunnel. By now some outdoor u3a activities will already be underway, and as we move through May and June, u3as will be considering the best ways for interest groups to get together. The national website has extensive guidance based on the Government's official "pathway" and whilst this will quite rightly be seen as a major milestone, everyone is urged to show care and consideration when arranging activities, and please recognize the risks of any activities you are planning.

At the time of writing, the Government has not announced any future conditions on attending public meetings such as u3a meetings. Consequently, whilst all u3as are separate charities and can make their own rules, there should be no need to impose meeting conditions such as evidence of a vaccination or clear Covid test.

But what will be the main items on the agenda of your first committee meeting?

National u3a Day is scheduled for 2 June, retention and recruitment will feature strongly, and many u3as have been waiting to arrange a face-to-face AGM. Quite a few u3as have already started strategy discussions to plot the future expansion of their u3a, whilst a few have suggested that survival is their main target. But whatever you plan, there will always be help and support at hand, so seek advice from neighbouring u3as or from your local network. I am always available at the end of a phone call or email, and the regional and national websites are easy to access.



Best wishes as we emerge (slowly and carefully) from the gloom of the last 13 months.

Allan Walmsley, Trustee for the West Midlands

WED 2 JUNE: NATIONAL U3A DAY

Despite all the arguments, the national u3a Day is going ahead and some of the plans for outdoor activities are absolutely astonishing. And if most u3as take part, we should make a national impact. Plan activities for later in the year if you wish but try to **announce** your activities **on 2 June**.

See the u3a day webpage and Facebook group for more info and start planning now!

EM 26-03-21 Link to u3a mailing on constitutions and Covid guidance

Copy and paste the following link

[https://mailchi.mp/u3a/em-26-03-21-u3a-constitution-and-covid-advice?e=\[UNIQID\]](https://mailchi.mp/u3a/em-26-03-21-u3a-constitution-and-covid-advice?e=[UNIQID])

Push Back Ageism Webinars

EM 15-04-21 u3a Join our ageism webinars, Control and click:

[Euroageism and u3a - seminar series on Ageism Tickets, Multiple Dates | Eventbrite](#)

Share your u3a Day ideas on <https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/u3a-day>

Or Control+Click [HERE](#)

Unable to book on the recent Finance Workshop?

Issued raised are available in the Financial Matters on the National Website

IG ACCOUNTS TO BE PART OF U3A AC-

Note from Chair of Governance Committee, Jeff Carter, on General Accounting and Interest Groups

In 2017 the Trust revised its financial advice to charities to conform with the requirements of the Charity Commission who require that all the activities undertaken in the name of the charity should be regarded as charitable. As such this requires that the u3a consolidates the financial transactions of its interest groups in the annual accounts of the u3a.

Subsequently questions had been raised as to whether it was possible to regard interest groups as being in some way semi independent of the main u3a and therefore their financial activities not included in the u3as accounts. In order to resolve the issue the Trust consulted a barrister specialising in charity law.

The legal opinion makes it clear that study groups are either fully part of a u3a or they are not, there is no intermediate status. This means that the assets and liabilities of a study group are those of the u3a and therefore have to be consolidated into the u3as annual accounts. The trustees of the u3a need to ensure that they have in place some oversight of the activities of its study groups to ensure that any assets held by the interest group are properly accounted for.

NETFEST 14-18 June 2021

Networks are vital links in the communication chain across the organisation and are greatly valued by the Trust. But do you know how they fit in and what they can and cannot do?

More content and registration details will be sent to all Network contacts.

RETAIN & RECRUIT U3A MEMBERS

A Working Party of members from 65 u3as has produced 35 tools to help with the retention and recruitment campaign.

There are papers, presentations & videos, showing how a bit of thought & lateral thinking can help u3as to stem & reverse reductions in membership and adjust an ageing profile.

The Toolkit is on the main u3a website under the **Sources** Online section.

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FIRST REGIONAL SUBJECT WEEK -EXPLORING WORLD FAITHS - HOW DID IT GO?

Our first Regional Subject Week, **Exploring World Faiths**, has just finished and it has been a roaring success. Over 270 members joined the first session on Christianity, and the audience averaged over 200 for each of the next four days. Subjects included Islam and Christian Science, Hinduism and Buddhism, Baha'I and Sikh, and Judaism and Scientology.

Dr Peter Rookes, National Subject Adviser for Exploring World Faiths, said he was delighted with the response. "This week has certainly put World Faiths on the u3a map. We looked at each faith objectively and from a historical viewpoint, without any prothletising, and members asked some really interesting and searching questions. Lots of members enquired about starting an interest group in their own u3a and we are looking at ways of supporting them."

If any member is thinking about setting up an Exploring World Faiths group, Peter would love to hear from you on pjrookes@gmail.com, mobile: 07703 336 088.

LETS TALK POETRY

If you belong to a poetry (or literature) group, does the idea of a reading and discussion session (no writing) with a successful and experienced poet appeal? Well, we have just the man in our ranks. Bert Flitcroft, a member of Madeley and District u3a poetry group, first appeared when he was invited to read from his poetry collection 'Singing Puccini at the kitchen sink'. This year (when meetings begin again) he will be repeating this by reading and chatting about his third collection 'JUST ASKING', published in December.

After many years reading at festivals, running workshops, as poet-in-residence at different venues, etc, there is nothing he enjoys more than sharing his poetry informally and chatting to groups about the poems - their starting points, techniques adopted, emotional impact and so on. Most poetry readings, he feels, are rather sterile events with a passive audience but he runs informal sessions with plenty of relaxed discussion so that it is a two-way interactive process.

He has performed at a number of national festivals including the Edinburgh International Book Festival, Birmingham, Stoke, Ilkley, Buxton, Lichfield, and has performed at The Birmingham Rep, as well as the CBSO Centre and The Conservatoire in Birmingham.

In 2015 he was Poet in Residence at The Southwell Poetry Festival and has been Poet in Residence with one of our 'National Treasures', The Wedgwood Collection at the V&A ; at the Brampton Museum and Gallery in Newcastle; the prestigious R.I.B.A. exhibition 'The Road Less Travelled' ,and recently as part of the University of Keele project 'Labelling the Museum.'

He ran for a number of years residential poetry-writing courses working alongside poets such as Carol Ann Duffy, Adrian Henry, Linda France and others. He was Staffordshire Poet Laureate 2015-2017 and curated the on-line 'The Staffordshire Poetry Collection'.

You can contact Bert at: bflitcroft@btinternet.com or www.bert-flitcroft-poetry.com



U3a in the Time of Corona

This is a book based on the Diary Project, which has been created by U3A members from all over the country.

It chronicles our reactions to coronavirus and isolation, as well as how to get a supermarket delivery, how to cut your own hair and what to do with all that free time.

Some people sent drawings, photographs and poems which have been included. The book is A4 format, 120pp with colour printing and costs £10.

If you would like a copy, please go to the order form on the national website – use the link below and look for 'You can purchase a copy . . . [here](#)'.

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/national-programmes/2020-programmes/diary-project-2020>

LATEST COVID GUIDELINES

The latest guidance is set out on the national u3a website

Click the link below to see how it applies to your u3a:

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/covid-19-advice-on-u3a-activities/897-covid-19-advice-on-u3a-activities-in-england-u3a-kms-d0c-074>

DATE FOR YOUR

DIARY: *The Third Age Trust AGM will held on Thursday 26 August* . It will be online or a hybrid depending on Covid rules at the time.

Does your u3a want to propose a resolution?

Here is your chance. Notification and Minutes available [HERE](#)

SCAM ALERT

To read the latest advice on how to avoid being cheated by online and other fraudsters, click [HERE](#)

Andy Cowan, Subject Advisor Crown Green Bowls writes:

The BCGBA has issued The Back To Bowls document on the 26th March 2021 for English Clubs.

Step 1 started on Monday 29th March 2021. U3A's are classed as Organised Sport because:

Either the Host Club or a Team using the Bowling Green on which the U3A practices will be Affiliated to the BCGBA and we the U3A can use the following clause: Internal Club Events or Organised Sessions for Club Members.

The Format of Play, Allows: Singles – 4 Jacks on the Green. Pairs – 3 Jacks on the Green.

Any combination of Formats may be played however, the maximum number is based on the number of jacks on the green (Outdoor Green at any one time should not exceed 16 Players)



Hygiene: Hand Sanitise at regular intervals, especially if you have to touch communal surfaces or equipment. Once you are home, remember to wash your hands thoroughly.

Equipment: Try to avoid using shared equipment whenever possible-Players are advised to have their own Jack/Mat during any session. If you are sharing equipment, for example Jacks/Mats, practice strict hand hygiene including sanitisation after using any shared equipment. Should any Measuring be necessary Players must use their own Measures.

Spectators are not allowed at any sessions. Players should attend the sessions dressed in the clothes they intend to bowl in and Toilet Facilities should be provided by the Host Club/Council. You are NOT required to wear Face Coverings while taking part in sport outdoor sessions The required Risk Assessment, should be completed by the Host Club/Council and a copy should be kept for a reference by the U3A using the facility.

Each U3A is to maintain a Full List of Bowlers who attend for each session and the records are to be kept until further notice.

A Full copy of the restriction are available by E Mailing andycowan2010@hotmail.co.uk

BCGBA– Return to Play Guidance for Affiliated Clubs, Counties and Associate Members Step Two – has just been issued on 9 April 2021. Further changes have been made from 12 April:

- Outdoor hospitality can open in accordance with the government guidance on hospitality settings
- Changing rooms can be opened, but participants should be encouraged to avoid or minimise use where possible. Participants should socially distance whilst in changing rooms. Subject to available space, more than one household can use changing facilities at one time but they must not mix and must adhere to capacity limits set by the club
- Travel should be minimised but can take place for the purpose of sport and physical activity. Car sharing, however, isn't permitted •
- Spectators are only allowed on public land, where they must adhere to social gathering limits either in groups of six or two households •
- Further flexibility has been provided with regard to playing formats and arrangements

Full document available on the regional website or copy and paste: <https://u3asites.org.uk/files/w/west-midlands/docs/crowngreenbowls.pdf>

If you have any queries or wish to discuss any matters, please contact Andy by E Mail or by ringing 01543 274966

AND IF YOUR INTEREST IS ONLINE BRIDGE.....

If you're missing your regular Face-to-face Bridge club meetings, you're not alone! Like you, Great Yarmouth U3A Bridge Club wanted to keep playing during these strange and difficult times, so they decided to go online.

Back in July during the first lockdown, Steve & Tony from Great Yarmouth U3A arranged to join forces with Bridge players from Palmers Green and Southgate U3A to play online, using Bridge Club Live (BCL) as a platform.



This hybrid Bridge club had been such a great success that they decided to invite other players from other U3As using an entry in Third Age Matters. More U3A Bridge Groups joined resulting in a trebling of weekly playing sessions and increasing interest.

Bridge Club Live's main function is to provide a service for players from around the world to play with real people (not robots!) at whatever

level they choose.

Where it's great for U3A clubs, though, is that it also provides a space for them to meet each other and play in a friendly and comfortable atmosphere.

BCL also has an audio/visual facility whereby members can chat to each other while actually playing, which brings back some of the social aspect of Bridge that we all miss.

The club also offers new players the added buffer of BCL's Coaching Corner where they can practise and ask question before playing in other 'rooms'.

U3a members are on hand to offer taster sessions and mentoring as well as to direct newcomers to social Bridge and the weekly 'friendly duplicate' sessions that are available.

The cost of playing online is hardly any different to our normal 'table money' except that whereas we would normally pay £2 - £3 for a (typical) 2-hour session, for the same money you can play 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This includes unlimited play in all rooms and competitions as well as the 'Face-to-face' club session.

So why not come and join like-minded U3A Bridge lovers?

By playing Bridge online we can keep our love of the game alive while waiting for the day when we can actually sit at a table with our friends, Face-to-face.

For further information email Bridgeclubs@eastnorfolk.org or 'phone 07749 888830 (voicemail)

or go online at https://www.bridgewebs.com/cgi-bin/bwoo/bw.cgi?club=eastnorfolk&pid=display_page5

GET THE NATIONAL U3A NEWSLETTER!

Sign up [here](#)

It's a great way of finding out what's going on in u3as across the country: **you can copy all the best ideas!**

NATIONAL NETWORK WEEK 14-18 June

Will review the role of networks in u3a: more info soon.

MODEL

CONSTITUTION

The **new** Model Constitution has arrived and is available on the main u3a website under **Support For u3as/ Document Downloads.** Look for Document

U3A-KMS-DOC-035.

Alternatively, log in to the main website and click

[HERE](#)

Research and Shared Learning Coordinator

Interested in facilitating learning opportunities amongst u3a members?

Special online meeting on May 10 at 10am.

Contact slp@u3a.org.uk

REGIONAL PR ADVISER

Hello, I am Chris Hartny-Mills, the newly appointed Public Relations Advisor for the West Midlands Region.

It is no secret that u3a membership numbers nationally have been in decline over the past few years, due largely to its ageing population. The advent of C-19 has, of course, accelerated this. It is anticipated that membership numbers this year could fall by 20% to 25% on average across the UK. This means that, as well as doing more to retain existing members, we must act proactively to recruit new ones.

Why PR?



PR is the precursor to recruitment, it's all about creating awareness of the opportunities our u3as have on offer, in our geographical areas, which vary from urban to extremely rural. This situation has instigated the creation of the role of PR Advisor and I have taken it on, for both the East and West Midlands.

What is the role of a PR Advisor?

My role is to work in an advisory capacity, working alongside u3a's across both regions, trying to identify areas where we can spread awareness of the u3a and project its opportunities, in order promote the growth of membership numbers. I have no illusions that some u3a's will have already made massive progress, others will not and some may feel they have all of the bases covered. There are many opportunities for information sharing, entering into joint projects with neighbouring u3as etc.

There are over a hundred u3as across the two regions. For me to be effective as a PR Advisor we need to develop a two way communications network. As a first step I have asked, via a message from Allan Walmsley, for all u3a's to send me contact details as soon as possible of their appointed PR representative (and to create the position if they don't already have one). These will be dubbed **Newshounds**.

A **Newshound** will receive help and information from me and, in return, may choose to provide me with news of any effective PR activities that will help other u3as across the region. This process is now underway in the East Midlands, promotional ideas and sample press releases are being circulated to other **Newshounds** and I am building a rapport with certain u3a's who are willing to help, or who are in need of help. I also have knowledgeable contacts who can help with Social Media, Website and R&R Toolkit issues.

U3a Day

PR obviously comes to the fore when we discuss plans for u3a Day. This will be an area of concentration over the coming months, I know opinions differ on the choice of the day and I can work around that.

Publicity Peer Group Meetings

Once the WM Newshound network is established I will be setting up Publicity Peer Group Meetings, by county, where a healthy exchange of ideas can take place. I aim to always be as accessible as I can, I will attend committee meetings, have one-to-one zoom meetings or will take telephone calls, to discuss what help may be required.

By working together we will strive to find these opportunities and get to spread the u3a name and publicise its culture and scope to as many people as we possibly can. This role comes with a massive remit, it will take a while before it becomes really effective, but I will do my very best from day one, to provide a service to every u3a that gets in touch with me.

Finally: Please remember, we are all volunteers, not professionals, so please be patient and I will strive to help as much and as swiftly as I can, without any intrusion.

Because of the anticipated traffic, I am using this dedicated email address for all West Midlands PR communications. pr.advisor.wm@gmail.com

Thank you for your time, Chris H-M
TEL: 07921 570033



WHAT IS THE VALUE OF YOUR U3A TO IT'S MEMBERS?

Another Zoom committee meeting and the lead topic was a difficult one. What were we going to do about the subscription fees for the 20/21 period? A short discussion ensued about the need to retain our members and shortly after there was a unanimous decision to give automatic free renewal to those members that were paid up in the current period. But we still had the capitation fee to pay to the TAT and the cost of the TAM magazine to meet - our subscription model includes the publication. Then somebody said, "how about asking for a donation instead of a membership fee?" Over £1,000 later we recognise the value of our u3a to our members.

Jim Christie, Chair Ross on Wye u3a

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS!

Volunteers keep u3a going – and we appreciate everything you do. But just in case you'd consider doing something more, there is a range of opportunities that you could consider — or perhaps recommend to a friend?

Nationally, you could attend the next Volunteer Coffee Morning to find out more. We're also seeking Trust Volunteers who might want to become expert in start-ups, facilitation, training, or join in u3a national projects.

The u3a depends on experienced members who are willing to advise, support, or just pitch in.

There's also opportunity to become part of the Region's Team. Email Allan Walmsley, Trustee, to discuss what you would like to do; we value all contributions.

In the Region we're aiming to run some **Subject Weeks** that all local u3a members can join in, starting with **Exploring World Faiths Week, 12-16 April**. We'd welcome help with that and other subject weeks.

We're also looking at the role and structure of the WM website, to make it more useful to groups in the Region - let us know what you think. Could you contribute?

CALLING ALL u3a CHAIRS IN W MIDLANDS

Every Friday, I hold a "Fireside Chat", a very informal Zoom session where Chairs exchange their news and views about u3a. If you're a Chair and haven't come along yet, please email me and I'll send you an invitation.

If you want to contribute to one of our newsletters, if you'd like to know more about any of the items featured

OR if you just want to say hello, email allan.walmsley@u3a.org.uk



STRUGGLING TO SET UP YOUR AGM ONLINE?

Help is at hand!

There are tutorials on the main u3a website & we'll publish guidance on the Regional site: take a look.

FEEDBACK ON REGIONAL CONFERENCE

If you have any comments about the recent W Midlands Region Conference or ideas for future conferences, let us know by clicking [HERE](#)

PROF. JANET LORD,



Director of the Institute of Inflammation and Ageing, University of Birmingham was one of our speakers at the Regional Conference.

Find her presentation & more on the Regional website: [here](#).