

Connect

West Midlands Region

Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire.

September 2021

u3a learn,
laugh,
live

A message from your Regional Trustee



So, we have finally reached a point when the re-awakening can begin. The summer is coming to an end, and September is the annual traditional start to the learning year. Whilst there are still reasons for caution, the signs are that the impact of Covid is reducing and many u3as are re-starting face to face sessions, albeit in tiny steps. As far as I can see, almost every u3a has planned at least one open session for September to gauge the initial feeling of their members and already I have witnessed

and read of quite a few positive experiences.

When planning how and when to restart meetings, it is important that committees carry out a simple risk assessment and listen to the views of members. The risk assessment is not a complicated or time-consuming exercise, it is simply a question of Committees asking in any given event, what are the most sensible ways of protecting the health and safety of members. The answer will almost always be simple practical measures that are acceptable to the majority of members. But remember, everyone is different, and many members have differing views about the best actions, so you will never please everyone.

Listening to members is also important at this sensitive time. After 18 months of limited social activity, many members are low on social confidence which will need to be built up slowly over time. Often the first step is the most important one, so encouraging members to initial taster sessions or short open social gatherings without a programme, can help to build that confidence. But some members will need more time than others and many u3as are treating the restart programme as a gradual process rather than a single event.

Elsewhere in the u3a movement, big changes are happening. The Third Age Trust now has a new Chair (Liz Thackray), Vice Chair (Michaela Moody) and Treasurer (Derek Harwood). All are u3a members just like you and, I but this changing of the guard signals a fresh look at every aspect of the movement. In the coming months there will be questionnaires, focus groups, and consultations on many subjects – all designed to create opportunities, better support u3as and their members, and create an attractive package for future members. So, look out for ways of contributing to shaping the future of the movement.

Allan Walmsley, Trustee for the West Midlands

JOIN THE TEAM

2022 is the 40th anniversary of the u3a movement and plans are currently being prepared for celebrations and events throughout the year. The focus of the year includes a further challenge to ageism with an All Party Parliamentary Group, and launching the new vision for the movement.

A new national working party is being set up to progress ideas and communications, and they are looking for u3a members who have never been on national committees before. Are you interested? If so I can send you more details. Contact me on allan.walmsley@u3a.org.uk

QR Code to Access u3a WM Region Web Site



QR codes are similar to click links, and are just another way of linking to information. This QR code is a link to the WM Region u3a website but the link can be to any document, website or source.

To open a QR code:

Search and download a QR code scanner app from your app store.

Open the app and hold your device so that the QR code appears in the Camera viewfinder.

The QR code will open immediately.

Thanks to Ross on Wye u3a for the idea.

GUIDANCE Constitutions and Covid

To access the 26th March 2021 link to a u3a mailing on constitutions and Covid guidance, click the blue button below

[CLICK HERE](#)

Meet Jeff Berliner our new P.R. Adviser

Hello, I'm Jeff Berliner, newly appointed Public Relations Adviser for the West Midlands Region.

I spent my working life in journalism - in local, regional and national newspapers in Birmingham, Bristol and London; I also worked in regional TV in London and the West Midlands within ITV and the BBC; also, in national and international TV in London with the BBC and Sky.

In addition, I have experience of working in radio, online news and public relations. My main experience was in news gathering.



u3as are being encouraged to restart face to face meetings within Government's guidelines and taking sensible precautions. In time, this ought to encourage members to be more confident about meeting their friends and colleagues. This should help u3as retain their membership.

However, there is also a major initiative proactively to recruit new ones, and this is where I hope I can help.

In recent weeks, u3as have been sending me contact details for their PR leads. My aim is to support them in the preparation and circulation of material with their members, but also to further improve contact with the media.

PR helps create awareness of the opportunities u3as offer whether in town or country. I hope I can point people in the right direction to get maximum publicity.

We can work together to spread awareness of u3a and the opportunities it gives through even better contact with local newspapers, radio and TV, social media, local and regional websites and other local publications.

I hope we can soon get all local PR people together, either online or face to face, for an exchange of ideas and to share the knowledge that many already have.

I am always available to attend committee meetings, or for one-to-one zoom meetings and/or phone calls.

For those who haven't yet done so, please send me details for your local contact and I'll be in touch. My details are jeffberliner7@gmail.com; 07801 179 714

Review of Member Services

The u3a Office has three departments,

1. Internal Services (finance, IT, etc),
2. Communications and Policy (PR, internal and external communications),
3. Member Services (which includes advice and volunteering, together with events).

Alison May, the Head of Member Services has started a review of the ways of providing advice in the future, and she has held a number of Focus Groups with the various sections of u3a membership around the country.

One of the Focus Groups included 8 Chairs from WM u3as which provided lots of useful information for the review.

A report of the Focus Groups will be prepared in August, and I would like to join Alison in thanking those Chairs for taking part.

We all look forward to seeing how the department sees its role in the future.

Allan Walmsley

Are there any Bridge Players out there ?

RealBridge is a British online bridge platform. So far, there are 18 U3A Bridge Clubs using it for online play, social bridge and teaching.

<https://realbridge.online/>

So what's different about this platform? Their website says: **“Taking online bridge to the next level, with built-in video and sound, bringing the true face-to-face experience online.”**

Here is where you can find out what it looks like, from a player point of view:

<https://realbridge.online/player-guide.html>

Along with hundreds of clubs around the world, the U3A clubs each have their own account and run their own games at a time of their choosing. They can choose to ask their players whatever cost they like, whenever they like, as long as they pay the RealBridge platform for usage, which at 36p a person, for 20 boards (about 2.5 hours of bridge) is a very affordable price.

The team at RealBridge train the club captains and secretaries on how to use the software. This is free and takes place regularly.

As a bonus for U3A clubs, there are free teams events every couple of months or so. Teams from clubs around the country meet up to enjoy a Sunday afternoon game. If you would like to find out more then please contact support@realbridge.online



Do you have a group with unusual or interesting activities which you could share with other u3a's ?

If so please send details and photos to Allan Walmsley your Regional Trustee and where it is possible he will include them in the next Regional Newsletter. allan.walmsley@u3a.org.uk

Exploring World Faiths – National Zoom Events

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 to access it click the blue box

[CLICK HERE](#)

In response to many requests there are 3 more sessions organised on Zoom as follows. There is no need to register in advance, just login on the day – login details are on the Exploring World Faiths Subject Page on the u3a national website. Queries to Dr Peter Rookes, National Subject Advisor, Exploring World Faiths, pjrookes@gmail.com.

Mon 4th Oct 2021 at 10.00am
Presentation on the Jain Faith by Arvinder Jain
Open to all—Click the join ikon on Zoom
ID 8586210630 Passcode 710220

Wed 17th Nov, 2021 at 10:00 am
National Interfaith Week – Faiths Working Together—Open to all
Click the link to Join the Zoom Meeting
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83806892192?pwd=bj11ZnJtbmpwSElrQjhlKzJ5bzJoZz09>
Meeting ID: 838 0689 2192
Passcode: 037603

Wed 8th Dec, 2021 at 10.0 am
Presentation on the Zoroastrian Faith
by Jimmy Suratia, previous chair of Birmingham Council of Faiths
Open to all—Click the link to Join the Zoom Meeting
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88320298223?pwd=blZWY2tHQ3MycHIENkVMYVhoUkxvZz09>
Meeting ID: 883 2029 8223
Passcode: 493046

Help to run Hybrid Meetings

Many of you may be aware that we have been working with a group of Tech skilled u3a members who have been collating and developing resources and information for u3as to run Hybrid Meetings.

This will culminate in a website covering information for running hybrid meetings of different sizes and complexity, How To Guides and short videos, and details of different technology and devices to consider.

We are aware that as most u3as are getting ready to restart activities in September the need for this information is now and the team will therefore be running drop in sessions that members can come along to via Zoom, to learn about the support that is available and to raise questions and request advice on alternative ways of running u3a meetings.

These sessions will be held every Wednesday lunch time between 13.00-14.00 the link and dates are below. Please can you cascade this information to the committees in your regions.

LRU3A is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting— Topic: Alternative Meeting Methods

Every week on Wed, until Jan 26, 2022, there are 18 remaining sessions all to begin at 13.00hrs
Sep 29, Oct 6, Oct 13, Oct 20, Oct 27, Nov 3, Nov 10, Nov 17, Nov 24, Dec 1, Dec 8, Dec 15, Dec 22,
Dec 29, Jan 5, Jan 12, Jan 19, Jan 26,

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.

Weekly: [https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/tZUkfuqppqzguE93m57siJj8aIJGwx49YALZo/ics?icsToken=98tyKuGppzIpG9GWtBCORpwcHYr4b-vwmHZbj_oOkUqyECl5aFv3H8hlJaorSeHx](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/81993153499?pwd=OHM5eTlCS2YxaUdyRlZMcjFLU2tKQTo9)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81993153499?pwd=OHM5eTlCS2YxaUdyRlZMcjFLU2tKQTo9>

Meeting ID: 819 9315 3499, Passcode: 754565

If you have any questions, please do contact me -- **Regards Jane Bailey, u3a 020 3874 7625**

CAN YOU HELP?

The u3a movement is only possible because of the time and commitment that you give to help our many committees run smoothly.

One of those key committees is the Third Age Trust's governance committee, which is responsible for overseeing the legal responsibilities and duties of the Board and the legal documentation, policies and guidance needed for u3as.

The committee meets on average 4-6 times a year and meetings are via Zoom. The Third Age Trust wish to encourage one or two more people to join the Governance Committee.

If you have knowledge on the legal requirements for charities, risk management or auditing, either financial or quality systems please consider helping us by applying for the role.

To open your email system and get in touch : —



WM Philosophy Week

Shri thought, therefore he was!

The first Regional Philosophy Week, Restarting the Conversation, has just finished. Given the positive feedback from 40/50 attendees per day, it was a huge success. Over the week there were almost 250 attendees largely from the West Midlands, but also from farther afield. There were five talks by members from Philosophy groups in West Midlands u3as.



Richard Batchelor from South Solihull	‘Why do Philosophy?’
John Cartmell from Redditch	‘A Modern Utopia? Might global warming push us into finding that elusive state?’
Susan Langley from Wyre Forest	‘Approaches to Practical Philosophy’
Adrian Barrett from Kingswinford	From Burkas to Brexit - a philosophical approach to exploring topical issues
John Blewit from Malvern	William Morris and Utopias

The presentations, as well as being very interesting, prompted some very interesting questions and shared viewpoints.

Shri Sharma, National Philosophy Adviser also gave a series of short talks on the Philosophy page on the u3a national website, and how to use it. He also gave suggestions on reading philosophy texts, listening to podcasts, using YouTube videos, as well as how to use open courses from universities.

Lets hope this will prompt the u3a philosophy groups to restart face to face group meetings but also encourage people to start new philosophy or discussion groups. If anyone wishes to do this, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Shri, either via the philosophy page on the national website, or via email on shrisharma108@gmail.com. You can also use this link: <https://padlet.com/shrisharma108> to access the u3a Philosophy Padlet Page (*Padlet is an online bulletin board*) and communicate with Shri as the National Subject Advisor and thus with like-minded u3a members in the West Midlands and beyond.

If you missed any of the sessions and would like to catch up, please go to the West Midlands website on: <https://u3asites.org.uk/west-midlands/events> where you will find recordings and slides.

Sincere thanks to Allan Walmsley for sponsoring the week and for Alison Richards for organising the event. Also to Robert Toft for helping Alison with the running of the zoom meetings.

Shri Sharma, National Subject Advisor—Philosophy

RELAUNCH GRANT

The “Relaunch Grant” mentioned in the recent TAM is available for u3as which may have used their reserves, have lost too many members and/or be unable to fund starting up again until they have recruited new members.

The Board agreed that £100 would be available for u3as to claim from the Barbara Lewis Fund (BLF) to assist with relaunching costs, or opening up again after lockdown.

(The Barbara Lewis Fund is a legacy left by the late former Chair, Barbara Lewis, that is normally available to start ups, and on which u3as in difficulty due to Covid-19 may now claim a £100 grant to aid in getting going again.)

In addition there is also an Open Day grant of £200 available to u3as (once every two years) to enable them to showcase their activities to the public.

Lots of u3as don't realise what grants are available – this is being addressed - so the idea is to let you know what could be claimed by any u3a you know of “in distress”.

If any u3as are “closed during lockdown” or struggling to do anything because their member numbers are falling off, their committee is having difficulty recruiting, and they don't have funds to re-launch their u3as, they should contact the Trustee for the West Midlands, Allan Walmsley, who will discuss the options and will be able to support u3as making applications for the grants.

Allan Walmsley—Regional Trustee

COVID 19

The latest Covid advice is on the national website under Support for u3as – to access the web site and see this advice click here

[CLICK HERE](#)

Nothing is perfect and as always most of it is open to interpretation but there are now no legal restrictions on eg numbers assembling, although the public are advised to exercise caution. However, businesses/organisations have a responsibility to create their own conditions to ensure the safety of their employees/members, and people will also determine individually how they wish to behave.

So it's up to u3as to restart face to face activities where their members are comfortable to take part, and with conditions that your committee feel appropriate to ensure the health and safety of members.

MOVING u3a FORWARD

The Third Age Trust is embarking on the development of a new strategy that will hopefully take us forward for the next few years. A programme for a consultation exercise with members has been prepared and four key aims have been identified:

Aim 1 Supporting An Engaged, Strong and Vibrant Movement

Aim 2 Making u3a membership an attractive opportunity for all Retired People

Aim 3 Developing the u3a Voice

Aim 4 Maximising the u3a Learning Model

These aims together with the key areas of activity identified by the Board were shared with the movement at the AGM last week. A dedicated email address has been set up (strategy@u3a.org.uk) and reinforced by an article in the next newsletter, all u3a members now have an open invitation to participate in a consultation period which will last until the end of October. The Aims and detail behind them, will be available in more detail on the website, but I would be grateful if you would **make your u3a aware of the Aims and encourage members to comment through the dedicated email address.** Attached for ease of reference and circulation are the key slides from the AGM presentation.

Timescale - The findings from the consultation process will hopefully be available for an informal discussion by the Trust Board during November 2021 with recommendations on the way forward going to the December Board meeting.

Consultation

In addition to the dedicated email address, there will be two other ways for u3as to participate in shaping the strategy for the Trust via

- An Online questionnaire - prepared using Survey Monkey and once finalised will be sent out at the end of September to all u3as.

Focus groups - Regions/nations are setting up focus groups of around 10 members meeting during the final two weeks of September/first two weeks of October. The groups will be facilitated by a manager from the office who will coordinate the programme and arrangements, and gather comments.

Regards

Allan Walmsley

Making Your Committee Bigger !!

This is a “How To” guide on making your committee bigger and better, written by Paul Martinez.

To access the document : ———

[CLICK HERE](#)

u3a Growing the Future

To mark the u3a movement’s 40th Anniversary in 2022, the Trust is creating a u3a anniversary woodland situated in the Brecon Beacons.

u3a member's contribution to the u3a woodland will help benefit the environment, wildlife and climate for future generations.

The movement's target is for 5,000 trees to be planted between October 2021 and March 2022.

This project will be launched in members' magazine, Third Age Matters, and will come to the brand centre during September.

u3a members will be able to buy individual trees or a copse of 100 trees and u3as are also encouraged to plant trees within their own communities.

Buy u3a woodland trees on the u3a brand centre.

To access the Brand Centre

[CLICK HERE](#)

HM Prison Oakwood -

Would you like to volunteer to make Oakwood Prison better ?

You are invited to join Oakwood Prison’s independent team, monitoring life in prison and helping to make sure people are treated fairly and with humanity.

Oakwood are recruiting now — to apply write to

IMB Oakwood Category C Prison, Oak Road, Featherstone, WV10 7QD

The closing date for applications is 17th October

Campaign ref is 1136/Oakwood/2021

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:

[CLICK HERE](#)

Newsletter Express

[To Third Age Trust Volunteers.](#)

Read the latest copy of Newsletter Express by clicking the box below.

[CLICK HERE](#)

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!**

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?

Contact slp@u3a.org.uk

RECRUITMENT TOOLKIT

NOW AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD

This project was started by u3a members to support other u3as. From social media to interest groups, u3a members of the group have used their individual expertise and experiences at their own u3as to create the resources.

Marilyn Lean, Chair of Plymouth u3a, urges all u3as to have look at the toolkit: "All of the toolkit items offer very practical and manageable guidance and I have been very appreciative of them. The subjects that comprise the toolkit are key to almost every u3a."

[Click here to go to the National Office download page](#)

NEW ON THE BRAND CENTRE

The first tranche of merchandise is available on the brand centre. This includes mugs, bags and badges. You can use these to promote your u3a and on u3a day. More merchandise over the next few months.

Click [HERE](#) to go to Brand Centre Registration Page on the National Web Site

NEW ON THE IMAGE LIBRARY

The national image library has been updated. This is full of u3a member photos, from walking to ukulele playing. Use these on your u3a websites and publicity materials. The Trust will be updating this image library once they start doing photoshoots again.

Access the image library via the Main U3A Web Site

To all Network Reps.

You are invited to a virtual Network Link Meeting on 12th October 2021 using Zoom. It will start at 10.00am and last for 2.5 hours. The theme is: What's Ahead!

There will be presentations on Member Services, 40th Anniversary celebrations, Beacon for Networks and TATTL Goods and Services. Included will be a short Q and A after each presentation then discussion time in breakout rooms. There will be a short comfort break in the middle. We hope that you will join us for what should be an informative morning.

Please sign up for this meeting by contacting Avis, by the 1st October, at u3anetworklinkmeeting@gmail.com

Please include the names of attendees, their email addresses and which network they are from.

At the moment we are not limiting the number of attendees from each network.

The link to the meeting will be sent out to each attendee just before the meeting.

Your support will be welcomed.

The Network Link Team

Looking Back on Lockdown !

This is a u3a shared learning project written by u3a members from all over the UK and compiled by the Research Network. To access the project and read what they have to say

[CLICK HERE](#)

ARE YOU A u3a CHAIR IN THE WEST MIDLANDS ? IF SO :-

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. — Allan

If you want to contribute to one of our newsletters or 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.

To access the WM Regional web site : -

[CLICK HERE](#)

Learn, Laugh and Move with u3a.

A movement-wide initiative to stay fit, keep moving and improve our general well-being. Hundreds of u3a members are showing us how to Learn Laugh Move. Click the yellow button below for more information.

[CLICK HERE](#)

CORRECTION

In our July/August article about speakers, on page 4, we wrongly used the acronym MIND instead of the abbreviation MND when referring to Motor Neuron Disease. We apologise for any confusion this may have caused.