

## Trustee for Scotland Report, May 2017

Seven months into my three year tenure as Regional Trustees for Scotland and I am starting to have some feel for the role and what I would like to achieve in developing the U3A in Scotland. I would like to share some of these thoughts with you and to appeal for your help in a number of areas.

### Third Age Trust Structural Consultations

The Chairman of the Third Age Trust initiated a major consultation exercise last year concerning the governing structure of the Trust and whether it was fit for purpose. This exercise has been conducted with feedback surveys and face to face meetings the length and breadth of the UK. In addition to the direct feedback survey that went to every U3A there was also an opportunity in Stirling in February for representatives from Scottish U3As to voice their opinions in person to the Consultative Panel (well one of them anyway).

The recommendations made as a results of this exercise have been agreed by the National Executive Council (NEC) and are currently being circulated to every U3A. In due course resolutions will be made and submitted to the whole U3A movement at the National AGM in August. At its most simplistic the message from the consultative process was 'it isn't broke so don't try and fix it'. Hence the recommendations involve some minor changes to the way the Trust is managed but no substantive structural changes are proposed at this time. Never the less the consultative process was justified in its value as an exercise in communication and engagement. These lessons have not been lost.

Communication is a two way process. The Trust is constantly sending out information and missives of various types. I would like to hear from you on your issues and concerns and anything else you would like to be aired. And I always welcome invitations to visit.

### The Role of the Trustee

A significant part of the role entails working with other Trustees on the National Executive Council and its various sub-committees. This can be summarised briefly as working to ensure that the Trust acts in the interests of all its members and the U3A movement works within the law and its charitable objects. So as Trustee for Scotland there is both a UK wide dimension and a role particular to Scotland. And it is in this later aspect that I want to talk about here.

We are fortunate in Scotland that we have, and you must make allowances for the language here, a Regional Organisation. This is the language of the Trust when talking of its representative structure. Please just take it as a label that carries no political overtones. The U3A in Scotland is our co-ordinating body for U3As in Scotland which acts as the vehicle of organising the way we work together in Scotland. I as Trustee work closely with the Committee of the U3A in Scotland, but we each have separate roles to play in the movement in Scotland.

## Growing the U3A in Scotland

One of the most significant part of the Trustee's role is trying to grow the U3A in Scotland. There are currently about 1 Million people 65 or over in Scotland today, which is more or less our target age demographic. Only 1% are U3A members. Further there is another 1 Million people between 50 and 64, the coming generation of U3A members. U3A membership is not evenly spread across the country. An analysis by NHS Regions indicates membership varies between 4% in the Borders and 0.1% in Ayrshire and that is entirely down to the recently formed Ayr U3A. And in the most populous Region, Glasgow and Clyde, we only have 0.5% of the over 65 year olds as members. The largest number of U3A members in an NHS region is Lothian but it still only accounts for 2% of our target demographic. (A full report is available on the U3A in Scotland Website <https://u3asites.org.uk/scotland/home>. Under the Links Tab the document is Membership in Scotland

The one thing that the Trustee is responsible for and can actually do something about is starting up new U3As. Only, I have to say, with the help of willing volunteers in the local area and support from the established neighbouring U3As.

I am pleased to say that on the 25<sup>th</sup> April we started a new U3A in Glasgow West End. A launch is planned for a U3A in Paisley on the 10<sup>th</sup> May and one in Brechin on 30<sup>th</sup> May. See the report under the News Tab on the U3A in Scotland Website.

If you think there are other areas in which a U3A would be welcome please let me know. We can seed these areas with posters and the like to find local people that would like to help. I am sure my work here is not yet done.

## Volunteers

The U3A is an organisation for volunteers run by volunteers, but with help from the employed staff at the National Office in Bromley. We have a Chief Executive Officer (Samantha Mauger) and a number of other paid and highly professional staff at the National Office who are always willing to help anyone who calls on any U3A related subject. The rest of the nearly 400,000 of us are all volunteers, (with a small v). But there is an important role for Volunteers (capital V) to help across the wider movement as well. The U3A movement does not run itself. There are many tasks both within your U3A and across the wider movement that depend on Volunteers.

Volunteers are people trained in various aspects of establishing and running U3As. These Volunteers may help locally in their area, throughout Scotland or even throughout the UK as they prefer.

My concern here is to recruit people that can assist in developing and supporting U3As and their members in Scotland. The following list is where Volunteers for specific roles are sought now. Training will be given in all of these areas.

**Starting and Supporting New U3As.** Currently a team of seven people is being trained to assist the Trustee in this important endeavour in Scotland. There are other opportunities to help support U3As in Scotland and further afield if you are interested. Volunteers are

needed to run Workshops on the various specialism of Executive Committee work and other specialisms such as dispute resolution.

**Research Ambassadors.** The U3A is increasingly engaging in research of all kinds, sometimes as part of a local group and sometimes with third party agencies. Knowledge of the specialist skills needed to undertake research can significantly enhance the experience for all involved. The U3A has a network of Research Ambassadors in the UK. We do not as yet have any in Scotland. If you are interested in becoming a Research Ambassador please get in touch with me and I will send information on how to get involved.

**Exploiting Digital Technology in the U3A** - Life is becoming increasingly dependent on being conversant with digital skills, be it keeping in touch with family, social activity, or any of the other myriad commercial or governmental interactions. Being able to do so safely and securely is a big issue for older people. Volunteers are sought to be trained as **Digital Champions** who can show how to get the benefits and avoid the hazards for older people. This training will be organised at no charge through the SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation)

Being able to use and exploit digital technology in managing our U3As is also an essential skill. A small team of **Volunteers is sought to join a Working Party** to look at ways in which the U3A movement in Scotland can make better use of digital technology.

No U3A should pay commercial rates to acquire the necessary software to run their U3A. Most software is available to charities for a small administration fee. The U3A in Scotland has recently registered with The Technology Trust and can access software on behalf of those member U3As that are not registered as a charity.

For more Information any of the above please get in touch by email or phone.

I look forward to meeting of many you as possible at the U3A in Scotland Assembly and AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> of June in Perth.

Ed Link

U3A Trustee for Scotland.

[ed.link@u3a.org.uk](mailto:ed.link@u3a.org.uk)

01577 864183

07504 090898

