

U3A SWN Meeting Notes

20OCT25 6pm

Present:

Ken S -Chair, (Forest of Dean), Chrys S (Swansea), Joyce S (Sully), Paul L (Sully), Derek S (Chepstow), Elizabeth E (Cowbridge), Joan C (Usk), John D (Cynon Valley), Nicky L (TAT Cymru), Sue H (Sully), Carol E (Pontardulais), Derek P (Abergavenny, Jacqui F (Pontardulais), Julie K (Newport), Rhiannon W (Gilwern), Michael F (Usk), John C-T (Caldicot), John W – Minute Sec, (Bridgend)

Key takeaways

- John W is stepping down as Minute Secretary; Chris S (Swansea) volunteered to take over starting January.
- The South Wales Network bank account with Lloyds has been closed and funds (£403 total) transferred to Chepstow U3A bank account.
- **NEXT MEETING :**
The network agreed to continue with quarterly meetings, with the next meeting scheduled for January 21st.
- Members agreed that network meetings should focus on sharing best practices rather than having speakers, as speakers are already featured in other U3A events.
- Common challenges across U3As include recruitment of new members, finding volunteers for committees and group leaders, and managing waiting lists for popular groups.
- Several U3As reported success with social media engagement, particularly Facebook, to attract new members.
- The Wales Network Meeting had 38 U3As attending and discussed upcoming workshops on Constitution FAQs, Facebook, and support for group coordinators.

Discussion Topics

Network Structure and Meetings

Ken S: Suggested quarterly meetings should continue and focus on sharing best practices rather than having speakers.

- **Details**

- Derek S: Agreed that the network meetings should be for U3As to talk to each other rather than having speakers.
- Nicky L: Mentioned that North Wales network asks U3As to send reports in advance of meetings to facilitate discussion.
- Ken S: Suggested a "mixed economy" approach where U3As could send reports in advance if they wished but it wouldn't be required.

- **Conclusion**

- The network will continue with quarterly meetings.
- Meetings will focus on sharing ideas and best practices rather than featuring speakers.
- The next meeting is scheduled for January 21st.

Peer Support Groups

Derek: Reported on the success of the Secretary's meeting with 8 secretaries attending.

- **Details**

- Derek S: Secretaries requested another meeting in 6 months and suggested similar meetings for chairs and treasurers.
- Nicky L: Confirmed North Wales network runs successful workshops for treasurers, group coordinators, and new chairs.
- Chris S Endorsed the value of "peer-to-peer groups" based on experience with Kent Network, noting they were "invaluable" for sharing practices and problems.

- **Conclusion**

- The network will continue with Secretary meetings every 6 months.
- Similar meetings for chairs and treasurers will be considered.

Membership Recruitment and Retention

Elizabeth E: Expressed concern about increasing membership and attracting younger members.

- **Details**

- Derek S: Reported Chepstow U3A has 1,119 members with about 150 new members in the last 12 months.
- John C-T (Caldicot): Emphasized that U3A has no age requirement - only that members be retired or semi-retired.
- Elizabeth E: Mentioned Cowbridge U3A's 30th anniversary celebrations and upcoming open day on **November 30th**.
- John C-T (Caldicot): Shared success with Facebook engagement, growing from 6 to 220 followers in less than a year.

- **Conclusion**

- Social media, particularly Facebook, is effective for attracting new members.
- Open days are valuable recruitment tools.
- Clarifying that U3A has no minimum age requirement may help attract younger retired members.

Managing Group Waiting Lists

Chris S: Raised the challenge of groups being full with waiting lists.

- **Details**

- Paul L Confirmed Sully U3A has the same problem with waiting lists and difficulty getting people to set up second groups.
- Nicky L: Suggested a buddy system where existing group leaders help set up a second group then step back.
- Ken S: Noted similar experiences with walking groups in Forest of Dean, with people willing to join but not lead.

- **Conclusion**

- The buddy system approach could help establish new groups when existing ones are full.
- One-to-one conversations with potential leaders may be more effective than general appeals.

Collaboration Between U3As

Julie K: Shared examples of spontaneous collaboration between Newport U3A and other U3As.

- **Details**

- Julie K: Described how Cardiff U3A members met Newport U3A members by chance, leading to exchange of ideas about holiday processes.
- Julie K: Also mentioned collaboration between Newport and Caldecott U3As on gardening and wildlife groups, including sharing speaker lists.
- Chris S: Mentioned Swansea U3A is talking with smaller U3As (90-100 members) about working together.

- **Conclusion**

- Informal collaborations are happening naturally and proving beneficial.
- Sharing resources like speaker lists is a practical form of collaboration.
- Larger U3As may be able to support smaller ones to ensure viability.

Successful Group Activities

John D: Shared successful activities that are attracting members.

- **Details**

- John C-T: Described popular pickleball group using SPOND app for scheduling, with 18 players and consistently full sessions.
- John C-T: Mentioned coach trips to cultural sites (Titanic exhibition, Bletchley Park) that are always oversubscribed.
- John C-T : Reported success with Welsh language learning groups, requiring a second group for beginners.
- Derek S: Noted Chepstow has new groups including mathematics, novel writing, and life story writing.

- **Conclusion**

- Physical activities like pickleball appeal to younger members.
- Coach trips to cultural sites are very popular.
- Language learning groups have strong appeal.

Accessibility Challenges

Julie K: Raised concerns about managing mobility issues in multi-floor venues.

- **Details**

- Julie K: Newport U3A is working on personal emergency evacuation plans with the Dolman Theatre, which has three floors.
- Julie K: Noted the challenge of keeping plans updated as members' health changes.
- Chris S: Offered to share experience with similar issues in a village hall setting.

- **Conclusion**

- Accessibility is an ongoing challenge that requires regular updates to emergency plans.
- Sharing experiences across U3As can help address these challenges.

Financial Matters

Derek: Reported on the closure of the South Wales Network bank account.

- **Details**

- Derek S: The account with Lloyds has been closed and funds transferred to Chepstow U3A bank account.
- Derek S: Total funds are £403, with £254 for South Wales network use and £149 ring-fenced for future use for Eistedfods.
- Derek S: Asked if any U3As use direct debit for membership renewals.
- Chris S: Offered to share experience with direct debit from Kent, noting initial resistance but ultimate flexibility.

- **Conclusion**

- The network's financial matters are now being handled through Chepstow U3A.
- Direct debit for membership renewals is being considered by some U3As.

Gift Aid Updates

Nicky L: Provided an update on gift aid issues with HMRC.

- **Details**

- Nicky L: Explained that U3As should not claim gift aid on venue money, magazine money, or Third Age Trust fees.
- Nicky L: Reported that Derek Harwood (Third Age Trust Treasurer) is in negotiations with HMRC.
- Nicky L: Advised U3As to continue their current practices until new guidance is issued.

- **Conclusion**

- U3As should maintain current gift aid practices until official guidance changes.
- HMRC will not retroactively challenge previous claims.

Action items

- **Chris Short**

- Take over as Minute Secretary after John W produces meeting notes for the current meeting
- Discuss the role with John W before January

- **Derek S**

- Contact Chris S via email regarding direct debit for membership renewals

- **Ken S**

- Write to Michael Young thanking him for his contribution as previous Treasurer
- Create an annual calendar of meeting dates

- **Nicky L**

- Send Paul L the invitation to the Constitution FAQ Meeting
- Share information about the Yorkshire network's "open friendship" agreement
- Put information in the chat about U3A Network Link
- Send John D a link for applying for grants from Third Age Trust

- Share information about the York Festival 2026
- **Elizabeth E**
 - Organize Cowbridge U3A's Open Day on November 30th

PROVISIONAL DATE OF NEXT MEETING

21st January 2026 at 6pm (Zoom)

COMMENTS

Attributing comments

John Davey

26OCT25

“I did not make any of the John D (Cynon Valley) comments recorded in the minutes. I wish I could have!!!!”

The comments were made by John C-T who has confirmed the comments were his. I have amended the meeting note to reflect this.

The transcript did not differentiate between the various John's in the meeting, and I chose the wrong one. For future meetings it might be worth asking attendees to change their Zoom labels to show First Name and the first letter of their surname – no space- as well as their u3a to make it easier for the transcript to identify them e.g. JohnW – Bridgend