

Benefits of Local / Geographical Network

Written by Mick Richings 22nd November 2018

It is followed by the "Open Door" arrangement which is the protocol for members of Westnet U3As who wish to attend Interest Groups in other U3As.

The concept of a small local network followed a meeting early in 2015 an initiative by Neil Stevens who was then Regional Trustee at the time attended by representatives from Ilkley, Craven and Keighley. They agreed to hold a meeting of the local U3As of Bradford, Craven, Ilkley Keighley & Settle at which the possibility of setting up a small, local network to gauge the level of support for the formation of such a grouping.

The idea was to have occasional meetings at which two members from each U3A would attend. They do not need to be the same people each time nor do they need to be committee members.

This meeting was held in October 2015, and attended by representatives from all five U3As including Neil Stevens as Regional Representative.

The aim of the meeting was to look at how a local network of U3As would benefit its members and decide whether we wanted to set one up.

A number of ways in which a network could help its members were discussed:

- 1) Sharing good practice and trying to solve problems - either general meetings or meetings for specific purposes.
- 2) Offering support for group leaders (e.g. new leaders could seek advice from people already running successful groups on that subject).
- 3) Training sessions.
- 4) Finding extra members for struggling groups or minority interest subjects (e.g. could we have found enough members collectively to run our "Poetry Appreciation" this year?)
- 5) Creating shared learning projects.
- 6) Study Days and Day Trips. (A study day/trip could be organised by one U3A who could then fill spare places with members from the other U3As, or it could be organised by two or more U3As working together.
- 7) Sharing resources (e.g. Ilkley has a number of i-pads and a tour guide system)
- 8) Publicity (e.g. running a stall together at an event)
- 9) Running joint events such as concerts or competitions.

The attendees at the meeting thought the idea had merit but should be put to their respective committees for discussion and hopefully approval. The constituent U3As unanimously approved the setting-up of a grouping. A meeting was arranged to discuss how we go forward.

This next meeting was taken up with how we would operate, and what to call the group and agree a set of rules. We agreed on WestNet and started on formulating the protocol, it was decided that the protocol would involve the following:

- Open Door Arrangements
- Joint Events
- Study Days
- Small and niche groups
- Larger groups helping the smaller U3As

After a great deal of discussion, a draft **Open-Door Policy** was formulated, this went back to the respective committees and after a small number of changes it was adopted. For continuity it was agreed that those attending should be the chair plus another, agreed.

The feedback from constituent U3As

Firstly, all branches have agreed to the document, AG proposed that in the light of an article in TAM that the title be changed, it was agreed to change to **Open Door Arrangements**. Considerable discussion took place on the feedback from each U3A where specific explanations were sought and clarification given, e.g.

- how will members know about other branches courses? from website;
- how will they book? they'd either go through the website or contact the group leaders
- how do we know people enquiring are members? trust
- What happens if a course is full? each U3A has a slightly different approach, some have waiting lists others may start a new course if sufficient interest, any waiting list would satisfy their own members before opening up to other branches.
- Study days will continue to be offered to constituent U3A groups before being offered to other U3A groups
- Grievance procedure what happens in the unlikely event of problems? MR agreed to circulate Craven's procedure to include as Item 12 on the revised document.

AG agreed to revise the document which will then be taken back to constituent U3As for approval, which it subsequently got and inclusion in their respective rules and procedures. Agreed Arrangements shown below.

Joint events: It was decided that it would be a good idea to hold a number of social events which would be a way of publicising that we have a reciprocal arrangement. These have included:

- Quiz evenings - at Gargrave, Ilkley and Skipton, the arrangements have been the venue provides food and participants provided their own drinks. Attendance had to be limited to 80 on each occasion, the next quiz is again at Gargrave in March 2019 but this time so that the Village Hall benefits they provide a licenced bar as well as the food. Interestingly we thought it would be a good idea to mix up those attending which was trailed at Ilkley but it wasn't successful, in fact it didn't work at all. Not unsurprisingly there was considerable competition.
- Discovery Trails - at Saltaire and Ilkley and held around the longest day, the next is planned for Settle in June 2019, again about 70+ attended, again refreshments were provided.
- Ceilidhs - have been held at the CFC Ilkley in November in 2017 & 18 and attended by 50 + on each occasion. It was decided that people bring their own food & drinks to keep the cost down.

- We looked at Dragon Boat racing at Saltaire and Coniston Cold, but the cost was just too prohibitive at some £480 per boat.

Study days: None have been arranged by the Group, these are being offered by either YAHR or individual U3As. The group undertakes to advertise extensively our members.

Small or cluster groups – the thinking behind this was to create small groupings of similar subject matter e.g. creative writing its been sounded out but as yet it hasn't happened, there's still time

Cluster groups would be various officers or group leaders getting together to discuss common issues and feedback to either their committee or group leaders' meetings. When officers have been spoken to, they agree it seems a good idea but no one is prepared to take the lead. Interestingly YAHR has taken a lead here with workshops most recently for treasurers, so that may be the way forward.

Post Script – what we didn't think about when we started was how to handle monies from our events and paying invoices, we just did it via Bradford U3A, but we quickly realised this was causing accounting problems for Bradford. We therefore decided to set up our own account, which we did with Barclay's which has worked very well. Then came along the edit from National Office about U3As groups not having their own accounts. I sought advise and just like YAHR it is allowed, the next minor hurdle was do we need a constitution? I sought advice from Sue Stokes our Regional Trustee who put me in touch with Hillary Jones National Vice Chairman and the short answer is no, some banks require a constitution before allowing a bank account to be opened, but in our case Barclay's at Keighley seemed content.

These have been minor hurdles all those on the committee have worked hard to make it work.

U3A WestNet

(Bradford, Craven, Keighley, Ilkley & District, Settle U3As)

'OPEN DOOR' ARRANGEMENTS FOR U3A MEMBERS

Representatives of the WestNet U3As met in January and March 2016 and proposed a move towards more reciprocal collaboration between our organisations. The aims of this are to improve the experience for all our members and to optimise the use of scarce resources.

The following protocol has been discussed and approved by the constituent U3As and communicated to all Leaders

PROTOCOL FOR RECIPROCAL ARRANGEMENTS:

- 1 To avoid confusion and/or problems, it would be helpful to develop common practices so all know how the system should work;
- 2 The system can apply to our Interest Groups/Classes, our monthly meetings and other events;
- 3 **For all Interest Groups – the Leader has total discretion about whether their group can accommodate an increase in membership or has space for guest visitors on an occasional basis. There will be no control of Groups by the local committees;**
- 4 Members should always contact the Leader of a Group/Class that they wish to attend – **before** attending. They should not just 'drop in' on an *ad hoc* basis;
- 5 Leaders may wish to prioritise membership for their own U3A. This can be done by limiting external access until after a stated cut-off date or any other suitable system;
- 6 U3A members may request access to Interest Groups of another U3A within WestNet, on the understanding that **this would not necessitate them paying the local/host branch membership**. They would expect to pay the same Group/Class subscriptions, or other fees that are paid by the existing Group members;
- 7 Members may request attendance at a couple of Group meetings as a 'Guest' (making any appropriate payments) but it would be expected that, after a finite period, they would become full members of the Group and pay normal subscriptions;
- 8 All such members would be covered by the normal, national U3A insurance;
- 9 If space within a Group is limited and the applicant has to be denied access, it is expected that this would be done with normal courtesy and the applicant may be added to any Waiting List operating for other local members;
- 10 The above arrangements would also apply to monthly meetings, Study Days and Summer Schools – as appropriate and managed by the event organiser(s);
- 11 The system can be reviewed in the future to ensure that it is working well, to everyone's benefit and that any practical problems are minimised. This should probably be done after at least a year of operation; and
- 12 If any problems or issues arise through these Open-Door Arrangements, then this should be dealt with via the procedures of the host U3A of the Group concerned.

It is hoped that this development will offer increased opportunities to our members to join Groups that may not be available locally; it might also help Leaders to ensure that they have better numbers for events to cover costs and improve the learning experience for all.

Amended November 2018