



Special meeting gives thumbs up to more groups and better publicity

“YES , LET’S PLAN TO GROW”

Members of Usk U3A say we should do more to set up new activities and improve our publicity internally and to raise our profile in the town.

A special meeting called by the Usk U3A Committee was held at Llangybi Village Hall on 26th July to take a thoughtful look at what we do, how we do it, and ways we might be able to do things better.

The result was a flood of suggestions for more activities, and more efficient ways to communicate with the public and engage with members.

The subgroup which organised the meeting, Maggie Corke, Joan Bennett, Jo Acton and Mel Witherden, was clear from the start that the meeting was not about making wishes and promises which couldn't be fulfilled, but about real needs and practical possibilities for change.

This Newsletter describes what was discussed and what we plan to do.



Members at the special meeting planning for a brighter future for Usk U3A

“I THINK WE COULD DO BETTER”

Treasurer Mel Witherden says Usk U3A is great, but there's plenty of room for improvement

When I first suggested a planning meeting back last year I think some members were genuinely surprised and confused. “Why do we need to think about the future? Aren't we happy as we are?”

The short answer to this is that we're all getting older. U3A constantly needs to refresh itself, its activities, its membership and its Committee or in ten years time there may not be much time left to keep it going!

Not everyone will agree with my view of the situation. But it must be helpful to take a critical look at ourselves once in a while and the challenges we face. So...

Understanding what members want:

Except for a very limited survey among people attending this year's AGM we don't attempt to find out what our members might be interested in.

Making members aware of what we do:

Until this year one of the main ways of finding out what was going on in Usk U3A was to look at the web site - which was often not kept up to date and few people updated it anyway. We email details of meetings to the 90% of members who have email addresses. But I'm sure we can do more to keep members informed and help them to feel involved.

Providing activities for members:

Opportunities for our members are actually decreasing. In the 4 years I've been a member I've seen the Photography, Culture, and French Conversation groups disappear. The Painting Group is due to close soon. Without the successes of the energetic new gardening group and our programme of Monthly Meetings we would be looking pretty sad.

Providing a wider range of groups: We have just 8 groups. Crickhowell, a smaller town than Usk, has over 30, and twice as many members. Almost all U3As in the UK have more groups than we do!

I know that Usk is a lively town with plenty going on in other organisations. But I think we could do better.

Encouraging people to help: Members are always willing to club together to make things happen, but very few people are prepared to take responsibility for leadership and making things happen. This may be understandable but why can't we adapt and SHARE responsibilities more.

Recruiting volunteers to key roles: The Secretary and Membership Secretary will both retire early next year. The position of Vice Chair is vacant. Where is our sense of urgency in safeguarding our future and finding people to take on these important jobs?

Building membership numbers in the long term: Membership, which was growing for many years, has stalled at just over 150. Is there no one else we can attract?

Improving our publicity: I'm convinced we could tackle many of these issues successfully if we managed our internal and external publicity more creatively and effectively.

Meeting our obligations as a charity: The principles of the national U3A movement encourage us to offer self-help opportunities to retired and older people. When we became a registered charity last year we became *legally obliged* to do so. **And even if that wasn't the case, isn't it right that we should do what we can to offer the opportunities of this great organisation to more people in Usk and the surrounding area?**

Mel Witherden, mel@sunlea.org.uk

Challenges, possibilities ... and priorities

More activities and better publicity come first

In a straw poll at the meeting members suggested that our top priorities should be to provide a wider range of activities and to improve publicity to help achieve this.

Close behind in the poll were the needs to encourage people to help with our activities, and to take steps to understand what members want.

This was by no means a scientific survey, but it was clear from the voting that other priorities such as recruiting officers to fill vacancies and expanding our membership also have support. See the results in the table below.



Mel Witherden records members' ideas for meeting the challenges

How members rated the challenges we're facing	
What we could be doing ...	Order of priorities
Providing a wider range of groups and activities	1=
Improving our publicity to help achieve our aims.	1=
Encouraging people to help with our activities	3=
Understanding what members want from Usk U3A	3=
Recruiting volunteers to key roles	5
Building membership numbers in the long term	6=
Making members more aware of what Usk U3A does	6=
Engaging existing members in more activities	8
Our obligations as a charity and the principles of U3A	9

WHAT IS U3A ANYWAY?

The University of the Third Age is a national organisation which supports its affiliated local bodies such as Usk U3A to provide activities based on three key principles. We should bear these in mind when planning for the future.

The Third Age Principle:

- *The U3A is an organisation open to anyone who has ended full time employment.*

The Self-help Learning Principle

- *Learning is for its own sake*
- *Interest groups are run by members for members*
- *We share our knowledge and experience with one another ...*
- *so there is no distinction between the learners and the teachers.*

The Mutual Aid Principle

- *Each U3A operates independently and is self funding.*
- *Members are not paid for their services - we help one another*

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF WE'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Some of Mel's challenges may be seen as controversial. Do you think they are fair? Do you agree with the meeting on July 26th that we should act on them? And do you think that members' priorities (see above) are right for Usk U3A.

Please contact Maggie Corke, Committee Member, cafnews@btinternet.com, tel 01633 430237 with your views.

Promoting what we do

Publicity: more & better. It's unanimous



You'll be seeing more of these display boards at meetings when we start putting your ideas into action!

There's no shortage of suggestions for promoting what we do - but what we lack is help to get them all going.

All four discussion groups on 26th July voted for more and better publicity.

They examined every aspect of publicity - from keeping members better informed to attracting new members by raising our public profile - and there were some *simply great ideas*.

Here's a summary:

- WHO** - expand our target to the **wider public** as well as our **members**
- WHERE** - flyers and Newsletters in doctors, churches etc,
- on our own U3A notice board?
- WHAT** - use "U3A" rather than the off-putting "University of the Third Age"
- focus on what's coming up
- advertise vacancies, eg Publicity Team, Committee roles
- HOW** - use Newsletter and monthly meetings to inform members
- use posters and flyers for the wider public
- use Usk Diary more, maybe a whole page, to reach everyone locally
- make separate plans for internal and external publicity
- WHY** - to improve U3A image
- to get people interested in U3A and get rid of fuddy-duddy image
- to create interest in new activities (not only in what we've done)
- to involve and communicate with U3A members
- PLAN** - Committee to set up a **Publicity Team**
- appoint a Publicity Coordinator to organise activities with Team members
- organise: for example, develop a standard list of poster spots
- consider special events aimed at a wider audience, such as open evenings or a special annual event
- consider sponsoring other organisations/activities to raise our profile

That's plenty of exciting ideas to get our teeth into. Now all we need is the Publicity Team. Any volunteers? Should be fun. Contact Maggie Corke, cafnews@btinternet.com.

Planning a boost for Monthly meetings

Successful programme could be even better

Monthly meetings haven't been going very long - just under 2 years - and they are already a firm fixture in the diary and a great success. But can we improve them?

No one is really sure what accounts for this achievement. Maybe it's because members from all the groups are actively involved, or because the talks have been so varied and interesting, or because this is a good opportunity to meet other members?

But one thing most Usk U3A members at the "Looking at the Future" do agree on is that Monthly Meetings can be even better! And here's how.....'

- New Members and visitors should be introduced and made welcome.
- We should make it easier for members to mix and start conversations by wearing name badges which also show the name of group or groups we belong to
- Committee members and group leaders should have special badges to help members make contact,
- The last part of Monthly Meetings should be devoted to informally sharing U3A news, sharing information with members, and proving a forum for discussion and hearing members' views.
- Meeting can be an opportunity for the Committee to bring problems to the membership for discussion.



Mary Nash (right front) entertained members as the guest speaker at a monthly meeting in the spring with her reminiscences of her life as a pianist. With her are Sue Morgan and Rosemary Evans who helped to organise the event.

- Our display boards should be available at each meeting to advertise forthcoming events, promote activities, and perhaps display mug shots of officers and convenors
- We should be ambitious and try out new ideas eg:
 - open meetings where we welcome the wider public and introduce them to Usk U3A
 - some meetings held in Usk town so they are easier for members to get to
 - arranging car-buddies to help members attend.
 - Bring in occasional "big name" speakers to attract interest in U3A - with the right level of advertising for them.

There's plenty to be working on.



Our role in making Monthly Meetings work

Responsibility for the regular programme of talks rests with the U3A Committee. But everyone has a role to play.

Sue Morgan (left), who has been helping to ensure that it will continue this year and in 2020, suggests that each U3A group takes on the job of engaging one speaker each year, and this has worked reasonably well. But we need one or two volunteers to co-ordinate the programme of events in future and help meetings to run smoothly. **Can you help?**

The only limit is our imagination

Committee member Maggie Corke describes the vast range of activities which are organised by U3A groups around the UK

The question was posed, “What can I do at U3A? In search of an answer, I have been looking at the websites of U3A Groups around the country and it seems U3A members have a huge variety of interests.

The range of different types of activity is simply enormous, covering scores of individual topics in science, music, sports, dance, literature, languages, history, philosophy, creative work, health and wellbeing and much more. From adventurous study trips in Egypt to the laid back Tearoom Appreciation Group, you could say there’s something for everyone.

One thing that struck me is that groups come in all shapes and sizes. Some are simply a few people informally exploring a topic together, while others have many members and a designated leader - and everything in between. Then there are Shared Learning Projects which involve whole communities. This is definitely an organisation where one size does NOT fit all.

The great thing about U3A is that there’s always scope for more. Members are encouraged to start a group for *any* subject or activity they have an interest in (provided it’s legal!). Plenty of help is available both locally and nationally to get it off the ground and funds may be available for equipment etc.

So the answer to the question “What can I do at U3A?” seems to be absolutely anything!

Here are some of the quirky things which U3A members in other parts of the country are involved in: dowsing, astronomy, world religions, motor cycling, humour, maths, bird watching, steam railways, armchair travel, treasure hunts, economics, and discovering villages.

Networking is valuable, but let’s improve communication

Usk U3A Network Secretary Jo Acton explains why we should do better

The Network Secretary’s role is to be the contact with the main administration and with other U3A’s. The big challenge is to ensure the information I receive from networking actually reaches our members.

There is a meeting twice a year of the South Wales and Severnside Group of all network secretaries. This group covers the U3A’s from Chepstow and Monmouth, through the Valleys to Swansea. Through the SW&SS meetings we let all the U3As know about events we are involved in such as study days, university information and other projects.

Sometimes a U3A has a visit or an event to which other U3A’s are invited, or maybe a very small group in one U3A wants to link with another U3A to form a more viable activity group. Several U3A’s can get together for theatre or garden visits, or arrange visits for special lectures - the network secretary is responsible for passing on the information to other network secretaries who will let their members know.

It is a very interesting role, and once we have improved our ways of communicating with all our members I hope I will be much more successful in passing on other U3A’s activities, improving everyone’s opportunities of a better and broader U3A experience.

Jo Acton, Network Secretary, 2joact1@gmail.com, tel 01873 812022/ 07572 448861.

We don't have to do it alone



Committee member Maggie Corke (left) uses a Powerpoint slide show to demonstrate just how varied U3A activities can be. Margaret Hatfield (centre) also explained to the meeting the simple steps involved when she started the successful Gardening Group.

Cribbage, anyone?

Fancy a few hands of the noble card game cribbage? U3A member Roger Goffin wants to hear from anyone who might be interested in setting up a Friendly Cribbage Group.

There are no firm plans as yet, but Roger says sessions will take place in Usk town at a time and place convenient for the players who join. Cribbage is an easy game to pick up, and the group will be open to everyone - dedicated fans of the game, people who haven't played since they were young, and complete beginners who will be given tuition and support.

The 400-year-old game has followers all over the world and is often passed on in families from one generation to the next. It encourages quick-wittedness and social interaction, and can be played successfully by almost anyone who can do simple addition.

The emphasis will definitely be on "friendly crib", but it could lead on to play in local leagues. If you are interested please contact Roger Goffin on rogergoffin@yahoo.co.uk.

Help with everything from U3A's Head Office

One of the great strengths of the U3A movement - which gives it an edge over some other local groups - is the level of support available from our parent body The Third Age Trust. Here's what they can help us with:

- Advice and support for U3A Committees, including legal issues
- Website maker for local U3A groups
- Resources for group Convenors
- Advice, information and support to start a new group
- Individual Subject Advisors
- DVD Library
- Third Age Matters magazine
- U3A Sources - magazine supplement and on website
- Summer Schools
- Educational Events
- Workshops for Committee members
- Networking opportunities
- Annual Conference & AGM
- National email Newsletters (sign up on website)

Brimming with ideas for new groups.

At the special meeting, the members' joint top priority was setting up new groups, and the group discussion sessions were buzzing with ideas. Here are some of them.

Are we sitting comfortably? We could make some cushions!

One discussion group not only had a great idea of a Handicraft Group but even thought of two projects to get it started. The first project could be making new cushions for the chairs in Llangybbi Village Hall. The cushions could be sewn, knitted, patchwork, felt, crochet etc to encompass many different handicrafts.

Interested? Contact Maggie Corke at cafnews@btinternet.com.

Let's have "A positive approach to ageing"

Planned discussion group will share ways to stay healthy and happy as we grow older – and explore what we can do if we don't

As we all get older, we perhaps imagine that we can escape from the difficulties ahead, and are surprised to discover it isn't so easy. We all know of different situations where we no longer have confidence, or feel confused, which can be upsetting and depressing. There are so many irritating and embarrassing times when some practical information would be hugely helpful.

Society seems to be becoming more open and informal, but it is sometimes difficult to know where to turn for help. The particular issue of Powers of Attorney springs to mind or just the practical side of opening jars or getting up from a chair. The number of times that we forget names or cannot find our keys seems to increase! The support from friends is sometimes helpful for those facing bereavement with the inevitable feeling of loneliness and isolation.

That's why we would like to start a U3A group to share friendship and advice about ageing. We would meet informally for talks or discussion, with also occasional speakers about different subjects, and possibly share suggestions about how we can help ourselves and others. *If you are interested please contact me, Libby Harry, on gypsyforth@aol.com.*

There will also be a light-hearted talk at The Sessions House, Usk on 31st January at 2pm.

Some other groups our members would like to see

- Bring-and-share sewing group
- Creative activities
- Theatre visits
- Trips and visits
- Younger groups
- Painting Group continuing
- Music
- Family history
- Science
- Film
- Local history
- Topical discussion
- Foreign languages
- Literary group
- Wine tasting
- Table tennis

We need to know if there is any interest in these proposed new groups. If you might be interested, please let us know by email to cafnews@btinternet.com, or phone Maggie Corke on 01633 430237. We are not asking for a commitment, just an indication.

How you can help to get us moving

Starting a group is not that hard

Margaret Hatfield who launched the highly successful Gardening Group provides some handy tips on getting things going

A group needs a convenor: A convenor needs to have an interest, a little knowledge and a wish to find out more about the subject they are proposing.

They are not a teacher but a leader to direct the group and have time to develop a program with and for those interested.

Setting up is easy: There are other convenors to give advice and the Committee will support with financial help for the set up meeting and they can introduce you to people who could help you. The National U3A has a useful website with advisors on many topics. The "Sources" magazine, which comes at intervals with the main U3A magazine is also helpful.

Where do I start?: The Committee can arrange to email everyone about an initial meeting inviting anyone interested to go along. This can be announced at one of the monthly meetings, with an invitation for people to leave their details if they are interested.

Don't be put off: If you have an idea for a new group that you would like to be part of, but you do not want to lead it yourself, invite people to sign up if they are interested and hold the initial meeting. Then see if a convenor emerges or a team of helpers. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Margaret Hatfield, Gardening Group Convenor; margarethatfield@madasafish.com

Vacancies for officers must be filled

We urgently need to find volunteers to take on important roles in U3A. Two key officers, our Business Secretary Mary Atkins and Membership Secretary Roma Meek, are due to retire in the New Year. *Without replacements for Mary and Roma we will simply not be able to function.*

We have no one in post as Vice Chair at present, and there are also two vacancies for co-opted members of the Usk U3A Committee which meets every two months. Support will be provided to enable members to take up each of these jobs.

Added to this we need helpers so we can make the changes recommended by our special meeting. The main innovation which has been proposed is to set up a small Publicity Team.

Each member might take on some individual aspect of promoting what we do - emails to members, helping with the Newsletter, advertising our activities to the wider public, and so on.

For this approach to be successful we also need someone to co-ordinate and support the Publicity Team.

There are already plans to train members to be able to post material on our web site, and in due course to commission a professional to rebuild our web site.

If you can help us with any of these valuable improvements to our work, or would just like to learn more please contact the Secretary Mary Atkins on maryatkins2002@yahoo.co.uk.

What next?

Meeting tells the Committee: “Over to you ...”



Members decided that our Committee of 10 trustees should be responsible for taking action on the meeting's recommendations.

This includes aiming for “quick win” changes now, and progress monitoring on all Committee agendas. A follow-up members meeting in 6 to 9 months was suggested.

The Committee

Contact details for our officers and Committee members are as follows:

Chairman: Mike Cowburn, m.cowburn23@btinternet.com, tel 01291 672832

Business Secretary: Mary Atkins, maryatkins2002@yahoo.co.uk, tel 01291 673539

Membership Secretary: Roma Meek, romameek@btinternet.com, tel 01633 450377

Treasurer: Mel Witherden, mel@sunlea.org.uk, tel 01495 769000

Network Secretary: Jo Acton, for Newsletter contributions, 2joact1@gmail.com tel 01873 812022, mobile 07572448861

Data Protection Co-ordinator: Joan Bennett, gdpr@uskU3A.org.uk

Committee members:

Maggie Corke, maggiecorke@btinternet.com, tel 01633 430237

Reg Darge, rtd@darge7.plus.com

Dianne Dawkins, tel 01291 672380

April Johnson, tel 01291 672857

Usk U3A Group convenors

BRIDGE: Kath Collis, collis.kath@gmail.com, tel 01291 672774

GARDENING: Margaret Hatfield, margarethatfield@madasafish.com, tel 01291 652972

PAINTING FOR PLEASURE: Sue Morgan, bryan@bryandsue.co.uk, tel 01633 450209

SCRABBLE: Rosemary Evans, tel 01291 672278

WALKING: Myra France, myra@caederi.plus.com, tel 01291 673377

READING GROUP 1: Hilary Burgess

READING GROUP 2: Rosemary Cochrane, rosemary@cochrane.co.uk, tel 01291 671567

Now find out more ... or just tell us you'll help!

FOR RESPONSES TO THIS NEWSLETTER please contact Maggie Corke, maggiecorke@btinternet.com, tel 01633 430237 or Mel Witherden, mel@sunlea.org.uk.

The Usk U3A postal address is: c/o The Sessions House, 43 Maryport St, Usk NP15 1AD
Web site: www.usku3a.org.uk. For information contact the appropriate officer above.

2019-2020 Meetings Programme

- 27TH SEPTEMBER** “SUPPLYING THE ROMAN ARMY” - speaker Mike Thomas: How the Roman Army was supplied with food, weapons and clothing to keep it nourished and equipped on its marches across the Empire.
- 25TH OCTOBER** “CLOCKS” - speaker Malcolm Hatfield
- 29TH NOVEMBER** REG’S U3A QUIZ
- DECEMBER** U3A CHRISTMAS LUNCH (*Date and venue to be announced*)

2020

- 24th JANUARY** “THE HAPPIEST DAYS?” - speaker John Sheen.
- 31st JANUARY** “A POSITIVE APPROACH TO AGEING” - A trio of lively and inspiring speakers: Christine Williams, Janet Jenkins and Sally Fleming-Jones at the Sessions House, Usk
- 28th FEBRUARY** “CHINA REVISITED” - speaker Gill Prosser
- 27th MARCH** (*To be announced*)
- 24th APRIL** “THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN WW1” - speaker Malcolm Meadows
- 30th MAY** “WYNDCLIFFE COURT AND GARDENS” - speaker Sarah Clay (tbc)
- 27th JUNE** “THE NEWPORT SHIP” - speaker Toby Jones
- 25th SEPTEMBER** “ABERGAVENNY IN TUDOR TIMES” - speaker Majel Lee
- 30th OCTOBER** “ALZHEIMER’S AND DEMENTIA” - speaker Michelle Morgan (tbc)
- 27th NOVEMBER** U3A QUIZ

PLEASE NOTE: Some aspects of the programme are provisional. Please check future editions of the Newsletters for updates

Monthly Meetings start at 2pm, and are at Llangybi Village Hall unless otherwise stated.

Usk U3A Monthly Meetings are a great way to meet other members and catch up with news of U3A activities. Refreshments are always provided. They are organised by U3A members for U3A members.

If you have ideas for speakers or would like to help keep this enormously successful programme going please contact Sue Morgan at bryan@bryandsue.co.uk.