

COUNCIL REPORT, WEST MIDLANDS REGION, JANUARY 2026

Jean Jackson, Council Representative

Monthly Regional Zooms

Each month, I run a monthly Zoom that any member in the West Midlands can attend, so that we can identify and discuss any u3a-related issues. Usually about 15 people (out of a region of 83 u3as), attend and they're not all committee members, which is good. I vary the days/times.

I visit at least one u3a each month, so the Zoom is an additional prompt to ensure that I'm aware of what's going on. I often find out about things that I didn't know about! They would be a useful input for a PR Adviser if we had one. Often, it's too late to arrange publicity to a wider audience; we may find, for example, that no photos were taken, and it all happened last week!

Recent Issues and Questions from u3as:

- 1. Difficulty recruiting committee members!** *(a perennial problem, but there are solutions)*
I'm part of Chris Bulford's Recruitment team, which aims to help. Have offered local support.
- 2. Lack of clarity about Third Age Matters magazine: should we advertise it to all members? Can we charge separately for it?**
I believe the answer is yes and yes, but there hasn't to the best of my knowledge been a clear directive from the Trust: take-up of TAM could be much improved, e.g. by personal subscription.
- 3. For new members, is there a clear one-page explanation about how they fit into u3a, so that they understand what the Trust does, what the Council does & what range of opportunities (e.g. joining national groups, becoming a u3a volunteer) is open to them? We need to promote the value of belonging to the national organisation.**
I don't think so, but said I'd raise this at the Council. It would be useful for members to understand up front that there's a national organisation and that they can get further involved with u3a if they want to. I list opportunities on the Region's website but many members don't know there is a Regional website!
- 4. How can we gain more Group Leaders/a Treasurer?** *Many u3as dislike the idea of advertising*
- 5. How we gain positive publicity locally?**
Is there clear brief guidance on the website? Can't find it. We need help from PR advisers (see next page). In my opinion, written press releases have had their day. We can gain more attention more easily in other ways.
- 6. Issue: several u3as have complained that the Brand Centre is not user friendly.**
Are there any plans to improve the Brand Centre & u3a merchandise generally?
- 7. Copyright – there's still a stream of enquiries.** *I think the u3a guidance could be improved. I refer members to the government guidance, which is clear and comprehensive...*
- 8. Members joining more than one u3a:** *We need more clarity about that and its implications. I had a query from a u3a that wanted to start an interest group jointly with a neighbouring u3a: no problem, members are insured by their respective u3as. But when a member of their own volition wishes to join an interest group belonging to another u3a, what are the rules? Does there have to be reciprocal arrangement for reduced membership fees for membership of a second u3a? I've asked the Third Age Trust for clear guidelines, will report back.*

PR and Regional Advisers

At present there are only 3 Regional PR Advisers out of a possible 12 (one per Region) , and their role isn't integrated into the Trust. My interest began because the West Midlands doesn't have an Adviser; upon reflection, and after attending PR Advisers' meetings, I felt that we needed to develop a "critical mass" of Advisers so that they could support each other and be offered appropriate training, so that they could become active as a group to help u3as and the Trust with publicity. In Sept 2025 Fran Suermondt (PR manager for u3a) and I proposed a plan to recruit more PR Advisers via a national webinar followed by an article in TAM and in the newsletter; I volunteered to interview an existing Adviser. I told the PR Advisers meeting that Council Reps would be willing to support a recruitment initiative. –

This recruitment plan is on hold now because of the appointment of the new Head of Marketing and Communications, to whom Fran reports. **I hope the Council may ask for this to be reviewed asap.**

Seeking candidates for the post of Council Representative, & Networks.

The West Midlands still doesn't have a Regional committee, although people will help on an ad hoc basis. Networks were my next port of call . We have the Cotswold Link (shared with the S-West), South Birmingham, Shropshire, Staffordshire (Stone Uttoxeter Stafford), and the Solihull cluster,. Good news is that there's a new (revived) network in the offing made up of Hagley, Stourbridge, Kingswinford and Wyre Forest, and Rugby may be interested in forming a cross-border network with **East Midlands**, which I will pursue.

We have one firm candidate and some expressions of interest, which I've followed up. This month we have run TWO zooms, to try to encourage candidates to apply before the 3 Feb deadline. In total we had 28 attendees. Thinking about how we might encourage interest in future, we might consider more **promotion** of the role – the recruitment pack is comprehensive but doesn't "sell" the role!

Jean Jackson

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