

Findings and Recommendations of the Working Group into the future structure of the Third Age Trust

Background

At the Trust's 2016 AGM, Chairman Pam Jones continued her six month initiative into discussions on the future governance of the Trust by appointing a Working Group (WG) to continue the exercise. This mailing, to all member U3As, provides an update of the WG's work to date. Please make this information available to your membership.

The exercise is the first instance of the Trust seeking members' views on such a large and national scale. The WG had no pre-conceived ideas as to the Trust's future structure. Accordingly, its findings below are a summary of members' views.

Since the 2016 AGM, the WG met twice with 20 Focus Group members, with 23 network or regional delegate meetings and with 14 fellow trustees. They also analysed 415 questionnaire responses from U3As and received 95 plus submissions from individual members.

Summary of the Consultation Process (CP) Findings

a. Networks

Networks see themselves as informal groupings that wish to continue growing organically, albeit with additional Trust funding. There was only limited support for Networks becoming a formal part of the Trust's governance. However, there was a desire for stronger two-way communication links with the Trust.

b. Regions

There was no evidence of concerns about the democratic deficit inherent in the large differences in the membership of Regions. The smaller regions were satisfied with the current structure, whilst U3As in larger regions relate to their local networks rather than their region. There was no strong desire to either split up existing regions, even the three largest ones (South East, South West and East of England) or to change existing regional committees and structures.

c. **Advisory/Consultative Council**

This proposal was seen by a majority of members as an extra tier of governance which could become a costly "talking shop". However, it was felt that short term specific "advisory / consultative" groups, drawing on the required expertise which exists within the membership, should be formed as and when needed by the Trust.

d. **National Executive Committee (NEC)**

Although there was general acceptance that the optimal size of a modern board is 10 to 12 members, it was also felt that a charity, such as the U3A, should have a larger board of 16 to 20 – as currently exists. However, there was very strong support for 3-year tenures for officers of the Trust, a reduction in the number of vice-chairmen from 2 to 1 and for the retiring chairman to no longer be an *ex-officio* member of the NEC.

There was a strong desire to retain the current "geographic representational" structure of the Trust.

The WG recognised that there exists amongst members significant minority support, particularly amongst the 20 member Focus Group, for a radical restructuring of the Trust leading to a smaller skills-based board. It was noted that, in order to pass such a resolution at an AGM / EGM, a 75% vote in favour is required.

e. **Regional Trustees (RT)**

There was widespread recognition that the existing role of the RT is onerous and can involve a potential conflict between regional and national duties. The generally accepted solution was that RTs should be focused on national governance, financial and leadership roles and that some of their regional duties should be assumed by the already established regional committees, networks and regional volunteers (RVs), taking into account local circumstances.

There was little support for changing the current way that RTs are elected to one that involved skills-based selection, via a nomination or appointment process.

There was general support for measures to improve RT continuity, and to reduce NEC turnover, by allowing RTs to serve for up to five years on the NEC.

The Working Group's Recommendations

- To encourage, and support the organic growth of Networks.
- To create a national 'Network Link'¹ as part of a strategy to improve the flow of information between the Trust and member U3As.
- The "Network Link" to access the NEC via a trustee, possibly a vice- chairman.
- To continue to open up NEC sub-committees, and *ad hoc* working groups, to non-trustees with relevant expertise and skills.
- To increase National Office staffing in line with the growth of the movement and to support the work of the NEC and its sub-committees / working groups.
- To gradually delegate parts of the RTs' current regional duties (e.g. new and failing U3As, workshops, seminars) to regional committees / networks / RVs, taking into account local circumstances, so that they can focus more on national governance, finance and leadership roles.
- To amend the Trust's Articles of Association, as follows:-
 - To take account of the changes suggested in the sections d) and e) above; and
 - To update the Trust's Memorandum and Articles, including those clauses relating to its charitable objects, by removing obsolete clauses and amalgamating the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

¹ For the purposes of these recommendations, the WG have adopted this "working title" to define a liaison point between Networks, Clusters, Links and any other informal groupings of U3As.

The NEC Recommendation

On 23 March 2017, the NEC received, and accepted, in principle, the WG's recommendations and decided:-

- 1.** They should be presented to a Plenary Session of the 2017 AGM, followed by a Question & Answer session. This session will represent the last stage in the consultation with members on future structure started at the AGM last year.
- 2.** To undertake a full revision of the Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association, including the WG's structural proposals. This recommendation to be notified and discussed at the 2017 AGM with any revisions to be submitted to an EGM in Spring 2018.

Future Timetable

- An article in the June issue of TAM will make the details in this paper available to individual members.
- The presentation to the July NEC of a detailed CP Report, by the WG, including details of nearly 100 submissions from members. Once approved, this will be available to members and will be placed in the Trust's archives for future reference.
- Plenary Session to include discussion on the CP Findings at the AGM in August 2017.
- Revised M & A to be presented to members for approval at an EGM probably in Spring 2018, prior to the Trust's AGM in August 2018.

Working Group into the Future Structure of the Third Age Trust

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April 2017