

## **Chepstow u3a Group Leaders' Annual Meeting – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

### **Summary for all Group Leaders**

Firstly, thank you to all the Group Leaders who attended the meeting and for your contributions. Secondly, apologies to those Group Leaders who couldn't make the date – we'll choose a different day of the week for the meeting next year and will try to continue to ring the changes so as to avoid the same Groups being affected each time.

This summary is intended for all Group Leaders as a reminder/update of the key points covered at the meeting.

#### **1. Update from the Group Support Team**

- New Groups - We welcomed new Group Leaders of existing Groups and highlighted the new groups which had been started in recent months: Chair Pilates, Mathematics 4 Mature Minds and, starting very soon - My Life Story Matters (Memoir writing)
- Coming soon? - There are some other new Groups on the horizon where there is already some interest but not yet quite enough to get going (please spread the word!): Italian Conversation, Rummikub, Novel Writing, Science and Technology
- Group Leaders' Induction - We'll be starting mini "induction" sessions for new Group Leaders in the new year. These will also be open to any Group Leaders who would like a bit of a refresher – please just ask.
- Group Leaders' "Group" - We had hoped to have a number of Group Leaders willing to act as representatives and be a "sounding board" on various aspects of our u3a. We haven't given up, although before we can get going we would need a few more Group Leaders getting involved. If you're interested (even slightly!) please contact us and we can tell you more.
- Group Finances – A reminder that the money in the bank is there to be used for the benefit of the members and shouldn't be allowed to accumulate above sensible contingency levels.
- Bank Charges – Unfortunately Lloyds Bank started charging us for paying in cheques and cash from November 2025. Please ask members of your group to pay any subscriptions by bank transfer if at all possible. If someone has to pay by cash perhaps a "buddy" could pay by bank transfer on their behalf and take the cash. More ideas welcome, there will be an update in early 2026.
- Lloyds Bank in Chepstow will be closing in October 2026. We understand that there will be "Banking Hub" in Chepstow instead, which will be staffed in rotation by a team of employees from a number of major banks. There is one in Monmouth already, which seems to be working well. More information when we have it.

#### **2. Update from the Chairs**

##### **2.1 Website**

- Our Website will migrate to the well-established Siteworks host, used by many other u3as. This will give us the longer-term security and backup that we need.

- There has been a consultation with interested parties in our u3a but feedback is still very welcome!
- The switchover will take place when everything has been thoroughly tested and the team is ready, there is no set deadline.
- In most cases the content of our current website will be moved across as it is and it will look very much the same as it does now.

## 2.2 Other Issues

- **WhatsApp** – quite a lot of groups now have their own WhatsApp Groups so that members can exchange information, photos, etc. There is guidance on the Website for Group Leaders regarding confidentiality issues and other aspects. However, whilst some members of Groups using WhatsApp are happy to receive relevant messages, they have complained about too many personal messages not relevant to everyone, such as lift sharing arrangements or birthday greetings. One Group Leader said that they have a separate “Social” WhatsApp Group for more personal matters. This seems like a great idea! Chris Chimes kindly agreed to write a piece for the Magazine to alert everyone to the issues with using WhatsApp Groups.
- **Beacon and Hotmail** – there is a continuing problem for Hotmail users who do not receive some emails sent via Beacon. This is a technical issue with the Hotmail server which can reject emails sent “BCC” to large groups, which is effectively what Beacon does. But the problem doesn’t affect all Hotmail users. Group Leaders are encouraged to check with their Members if there is a problem. Please ask Group Support for ideas for Workarounds, as it is unlikely that this problem will go away.
- **Christmas Party Numbers** – due to the capacity limits at the Drill Hall it has been decided to ask those who want to attend the Christmas Party this year to book a place. We will see how this works.

## 3. Discussion Topic A - Should we be aiming to be any bigger?

Stephen introduced the session, explaining that we have a balancing act to do between focusing on getting new members to join u3a (and retaining them) and ensuring that we offer an appropriate number and selection of Activity Groups and other events.

The Membership numbers in recent years have continued to grow:

Year	Membership Numbers
2018	869
2022	1000
2024	1045
2025	1111

After discussion, the consensus was that we must continue to grow, but in a sustainable way, not for its own sake. Recruitment of new members alone is not enough, we need to make sure that we attract younger people and people with the skills we need for the future.

Points made around the room also included:-

- We must have plenty of opportunities for new members to join Groups, not just waiting lists.
- We should be encouraging new members to contribute from the start, tapping into their interests and skills. Younger people, for example, may be better placed to help with IT skills.
- Publicity for the u3a needs to break down stereotypes – ensuring that would-be members understand there is **no age restriction** for u3a (just “no longer working full time”).
- Dual Membership (with another u3a) is useful.
- New posters would be helpful for recruitment.
- We could make better use of Facebook? Instagram?
- It was also noted that the Membership Bank Account has been changed. There will be a further email giving full details when Membership renewals become due in the new year.

#### 4. Discussion Topic B - Looking Ahead

The next discussion topic was about ensuring that we have succession for roles within Groups and within the broader u3a. This includes helpers within Groups, Group Leaders, Committee Members and Chairs. How can we do this?

Points made around the room included:-

- You don't need to be an expert to be a Group Leader.
- Different Groups have different requirements for Group Leaders.
- A team of Co-Leaders for a Group works well.
- Good interpersonal skills are important.
- For larger Groups dividing the tasks into bite-sized chunks, between several people, lightens the load and helps to provide cover for absences. Typically, this could mean different people looking after money (Treasurer), general admin and communications and website updates.
- “Job descriptions” for these roles in Groups could be helpful so that people are clear what's involved, what skills are needed and what are the time commitments. This also applies to Committee roles.
- An emphasis on job sharing and teamwork in Groups is healthy.
- When help is needed using the right words can work wonders – “Could you give me a hand please?” will probably work well.
- If a Group needs a new Leader and nobody in the Group wants to take over the position could be advertised in the Magazine.
- We should be encouraging new members to contribute from the start, tapping into their interests and skills.
- There could be a quarterly feature in the Magazine to remind everyone what's on the website, for example minutes of meetings.
- Shadowing of Committee Members would be helpful.

## **5. Discussion Topic C – Are we using the right words to describe roles?**

The final discussion topic was about the words we use to describe different roles in our u3a. For example, there had been some concern that the change of title from Convenor to Group Leader a couple of years ago was unpopular. The Chairs had therefore agreed that this would be debated. At the same time, the titles used for other roles in the u3a should also be discussed. What might be better?

After discussion most people were happy with using the terms “Co-Leader”, and “Treasurer” as we do now. There was also a vote to establish what job title Group Leaders wanted to use. The result was:

- Group Leader – 17 votes
- Convenor – 9 votes
- Co-ordinator – 7 votes
- Facilitator – 1 vote

In view of this result it was decided to continue as we are.

The meeting was then closed with thanks to all the organisers of the event, to everyone present for their contributions, and to all the Group Leaders in Chepstow u3a for their vital work.

*“u3a shows the value of communities of interest and learning which are not defined by age, or by past experience, but instead are defined by the experiences still to be explored”.*

### **Article about the Group Leaders’ Meeting as published in December Magazine**

Who’d have thought that there would be quite such a buzz on a Monday Morning? There were a number of reasons for choosing a Monday for our Group Leaders’ Meeting this year, not least because we can’t remember holding it on a Monday before! We like to ring the changes with which day of the week we select so that it’s not the same Group meetings that are affected each year. Anyway, it seems that Mondays are OK and we had over 40 Group Leaders attending.

Another first for this year was that we held the meeting at the Chepstow Club. The feedback we’ve had so far about the venue has all been very positive and our thanks go to the staff there for their help.

It was particularly good to welcome Leaders of new Groups and new Leaders of established Groups, giving them their first opportunity to share both ideas and issues. We also welcomed Group Treasurers and other key Group Members who help with the running of their Groups. Using bits of Lego (yes, we all love a bit of Lego!) everyone was randomly assigned to different tables so that we had a good mix of interest and experience at each one.

And, of course, we welcomed our (relatively!) new Chairs, Helen and Stephen.

After a coffee we started with an update for everyone, including the good news of an excellent response to the request for help with the Website Team. There was less happy news, however, which included the imposition of banking charges and the closure of Lloyds Bank in Chepstow next year. Group Leaders will be kept updated with developments.

Fuelled by more coffee, discussions around the tables were then underway. Topics included effective ways of using WhatsApp within Groups and social media to promote our u3a. Group Leaders also explored the issue of balancing growth and succession in Chepstow u3a with the need to ensure that we continue to do our best to satisfy the different interests of all our members. After which there were plenty of great ideas shared throughout the room. Our final discussion was about the “job titles” we use for Group Leaders, followed by a vote. The majority favoured keeping “Group Leaders” as they are, so the decision was made not to pursue the topic further at present.

And then we all enjoyed a well-deserved delicious buffet lunch, provided by “The Pantry” and an opportunity for Group Leaders to sit with someone new or to relax with friends and catch up.

Our thanks to our Chairs, Stephen and Helen, and to Jenny for all their hard work; also to Pam, Derek, Rob, Tony and Kay from the Committee for their support beforehand and on the day. Above all, thanks to our wonderful Group Leaders for all they do to keep their Groups and Chepstow u3a flourishing. Great Teamwork!

### **Helping your Group Leader helps your Group!**

Do you think your Group Leader might need a bit of help with organising things? Or with some back-up in case of the unexpected? They probably do! Please ask them, or maybe just offer to do a particular task one meeting, or perhaps more regularly. People helping out in Groups is the best way to make sure they flourish and continue.

Or is your Group looking for a new Leader either now or in the near future? If you're thinking about it but not quite sure, then perhaps a chat with someone outside the Group as well might be useful. The Group Support Team is here to help! Just contact us via [groups@chepstowu3a.org.uk](mailto:groups@chepstowu3a.org.uk). And maybe we'll see you at next year's meeting!

Rose and Sue, Group Support Team