MINUTES of
WOOLER U3A ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held in The Cheviot Centre
on Monday 15th September 2025

Attendance

Michael Allmey, Janet Allmey, Pat Boyd, Elaine Bales, Sue Chapman, Peter Davies, Jan Davies, Veronica Gilbert, Maggie Harker, Alison Hilton, Ann Love, Julie Manton, Steve Mellor, Andy Middleton, Judith Oughton, Pam Ratcliffe, Joyce Robertson, Margaret Rogers, Rachel Sinton, Bob Taylor, Joan Thomas. (20)

Apologies

Sue Cook, Alison Davies, Tony Davies, Rosanna Reed, Susan Turner, Colin Watson, Sylvia Williams.

Minutes of previous AGM, held 2nd September 2024

No requests for amendment having been received, Steve Mellor proposed acceptance, seconded by Pat Boyd: passed unanimously.

Annual Reports

The Treasurer's Annual Report was followed by the Chairman's Annual Report. These are appended in full at the end of the Minutes.

Steve Mellor presented Peter Davies with a bottle of wine and a card on behalf of the membership, in thanks for his three years in office as Chair.

Group Leaders' reports followed: Joan Thomas for History, Elaine Bales for Reading for Pleasure, Andy Middleton for Bridge, Veronica Gilbert for Table Tennis and Opera/Ballet, Bob Taylor for Art Appreciation. These reports, and others not presented on the day, are appended at the end of the Minutes.

Elections

Nominations had been received as follows:
Chair: Steve Mellor, proposer Caroline Mellor, seconded by Ann Love.
Vice-Chair: Peter Davies, proposer Brenda Smith, seconded by Bob Taylor.
Committee members: Joyce Robertson, proposed Janet Allmey, seconded by Yvonne Gallagher; and Sylvia Williams, proposer Jean French, seconded by Brenda Smith.
No objections being raised, each candidate was unanimously elected.

Members of the Committee for 2024-25, all being within the 9-year tenure limit, have agreed to continue for the year 2025-2026.

Date of next AGM

The proposed date is 14th September 2026, to be confirmed.

Minuted by Judith Oughton
Secretary

Chairman's Report 2024-2025

It is axiomatic that as one grows older time seems to speed by with ever greater rapidity so it is galling to realise that it is three years since I took on the mantle as Chairman {*or 'Chair' if you prefer which I don't as I prefer not to think of myself as terribly wooden, but there you go*}. The successes of our remote and relatively small u3a are due entirely to the Committee and the Group Leaders and I thank both for their work.

Judith Oughton has continued to astound me with her efficiency and enthusiasm and has combined the roles of Membership Secretary and Committee Secretary with élan. Steve Mellor has provided wise counsel and acted as a commonsense brake on many of the 'wizard wheezes' which drop into my brain from time to time. Andy Middleton produces meticulous accounts which even I understand. Colin Watson, our website manager, suffered a cardiac arrest at the Cheviot Centre on 10th July and was airlifted to Cramlington Hospital before being transferred to the Freeman and later discharged. He is recuperating at home, and we wish him a speedy recovery. Thanks to him, the website has worked well since the inauguration of the 'Siteworks' system. We have co-opted Joyce Robertson to the Committee and together with the other stalwarts of the Committee - Maggie Harker, Michael Allmey, Pat Boyd, and Jan Davies - has provided wise counsel. My point is that although there are roles to be taken, one can contribute at the Committee without being an office holder. Of course, Group Leaders are always welcome at Committee meetings; and we have welcomed Bob Taylor and Joan Thomas several times and last month, Elaine Bales. We have nothing to hide so if any member wishes to come to a committee meeting, you are very welcome and not just to see if you wish to join.

Our constitution prevents anyone staying on the Committee more than nine years in total. That is sensible as it prevents staleness, but I wonder if we should allow someone to come back to the Committee after a break of, say, a year. This is something the Committee may discuss.

Jan Davies has organised another series of interesting speakers, including today's guest speaker, Anthony Robb, who gave us a talk on "Global Warming-an Alternative View" preceding this AGM. We have also had talks by members of this u3a – if you have an interesting topic you'd like to share, please get in touch! The next Speaker on 10th November will be a representative of Silvertime Legal, a provider of estate planning.

With one exception which is now being managed, the interest groups' incomes are about in balance, and it has always been an ethos of our u3a that profitable groups subsidise weaker ones via our central funds.

We propose to increase the subscription from £5 to £10. The Cheviot Centre, which many u3a's would give their proverbial eye teeth to access recently increased the cost of room hire and now that Covid is past us, we can once again begin to think about trips. The first will be a free local trip to the Northumbrian Water Treatment Works in Wooler on the 6th October and will only last a couple of hours. It has been suggested that a future trip could be to the 'Treelocate' manufacturing site in Belford. If demand warrants, more ambitious trips can be planned; and we shall welcome more suggestions on where to go. Our Constitution allows us to subsidise trips so long as they are open to all members and the increased subscription will allow more flexibility and ambition.

With such a low subscription rate, the national u3a, the Third Age Trust or ‘TAT’, takes 77% of our subscription income and even at an annual rate of £10, the proportion taken will be 38%. Our members do not seem to access the national website, and we are not involved with local or national activities given our remote location. We meet our legal obligations without outside assistance as we are an independent charity. The Committee has set up a working party to investigate whether we should disaffiliate from TAT. The key issue is if there would be an incremental increase in workload for the Committee if we were to cease to be a member of TAT. Of course, the easiest thing is to do nothing which has a lot to commend it; and if we are not participating in TAT should we even contemplate disaffiliation, although the financial saving would release more funds for our use?

I remain concerned that at 137 members we have only a small proportion of even the older population of Wooler as members and I wonder if the oblique reference to ‘university’ in our name is off putting so perhaps a change of name maybe beneficial - although there is a brand recognition about the epithet ‘u3a’.

We have a couple of Groups at full capacity viz: Wine Appreciation {*no surprise there*} and Philosophy. We can assist any member who wishes to start a second group on the same subject; although the day of the month would have to be different to the ‘mother’ group. The best recruitment is by ‘word of mouth’ so please mention us to friends and acquaintances who could enjoy attending meetings and interest groups. We have leaflets available.

We are investigating the purchase of a radio microphone to assist those with hearing difficulties. I understand that there is a hearing aid loop at the Cheviot Centre, so we will avail ourselves of that to help those with hearing aids.

Some of the bi-monthly social meetings have been poorly attended so we are making them more social and providing cake as well as the usual tea and coffee. Please let us know if there are any subjects you wish to learn more about or interesting speakers of whom you are aware.

Finally, thank you for putting up with me for the last three years.

Peter Davies 15/8/25.

Treasurer's Report AGM 15th September 2025

Our bank account at the end of August was £2,811, which is £330 less than our balance of £3,141 this time last year.

In line with most banks, our account with the Bank of Scotland will be introducing bank fees in November - charity accounts are a thing of the past. We will soon have to pay £4.25 a month, or £51 a year.

We've put two pie charts on the notice board which shows at a glance where our money comes from, and where it is spent. The charts cover October '24 to August '25.

INCOME

As we said last year, our u3a income comes solely from gift aid, our annual membership fees, Group fees to cover room hire costs, and gifts or donations. In January Janet Allmey kindly gave us £21 from a sale of books.

Gift Aid

Our Gift Aid is an important source of funding. We get 20p back for every £1 of membership fee if the gift aid form is completed. Whilst not everyone qualifies for gift aid, if you pay tax then as long as the tax paid exceeds your total gift aid contribution you can complete the form, for us and any other charity you choose. This year we received £49 from HMRC.

Wooler u3a Annual Membership Fees

We decided to reduce our membership fees a few years ago to reduce our bank balance a little, which has had the desired effect. The Committee has reviewed the annual fee and this will now increase from £5 to £10 per year. This is still lower than in earlier years, but we feel that this will help us to maintain a healthy bank balance.

Group Fees

This income is the money each Group charges for attendance to cover room hire. So far this year we have received £5,225.73. in Group fees. The cost of room hire has been £5,131.50. So we have a narrow surplus of £94.23.
Whilst we're on this topic - the envelopes occasionally used for Group fees can result in loose money in the letterbox, or at the other extreme, the need to perform surgery to get through the Sellotape. We do provide small brown envelopes on the side of the letterbox – please feel free to take some! Also, please check that the amount of money in the envelope matches the amount written on the outside, with the group name and date.

EXPENDITURE

Our biggest annual expenditure is room hire, followed by National u3a membership.

Room Hire

Room hire costs for the ten months so far this year has been £5,131, which is covered by Group fees. Since the URC and the Glendale Trust increased their fees earlier this year we have seen a small shortfall each month on the group fees paid to cover room hire costs.

This shortfall does accumulate, so we ask that Group Leaders review room booking costs and adjust the individual meeting contributions accordingly.

The Glendale Centre charges £9 per hour, and the URC charges the table tennis group £16 per session on a Tuesday, and £20 on a Friday. This is still a very reasonable cost for facilities we are fortunate to have.

National u3a membership

Our second largest cost is our National u3a membership at £4 per person, £548. The National u3a charges £4 per member per year, which meant that for the year 24/25 we paid £4 from our £5 membership fee. With this year's membership fee increasing to £10, we will retain £6 for Wooler u3a, where in previous years we kept just £1.

Other Costs

This year we have focused a little on reducing our photocopying costs, which have fallen considerably. Last year we paid an average of £34.54 per month.
We currently pay 15p per side of B&W A4, and 55p for colour. So far this year we have averaged £9.08 per month!

It's worth mentioning that one of our other minor costs is Shauna who takes care of the kitchen, helping us behind the scenes for meetings such as the AGM, and who does a great job.

Andy Middleton
September 2025

Group Leaders' Reports

History – Joan Thomas

I'm happy to report that History Group has survived for another year. We have had good meeting attendances and have managed to get by with using only 4 outside speakers. The majority of presentations have been made by either history group or other u3a members, and the subjects have been varied and interesting. I am much encouraged by the support of group members and look forward to that continuing over the coming year.

Geology – Susan Turner

The Geology Group's year started in the absence of our tutor, Elizabeth Devon, who was recovering from an operation. We coped by recruiting two excellent guest speakers (Niall Ridley and Roger Birch) and screening a video. Elizabeth returned in February and has delivered her splendid monthly talks since then.
We normally see around a dozen members at each meeting, some from other local u3as, although this month's talk on the subject of climate change over geological time attracted some 24 people. Elizabeth's engaging sessions cater for all levels of knowledge or none and our very friendly group welcomes new members. The next talk is on October 2nd and is *The Cheviot Volcanoes: would you have survived?* Do join us and find out.

Reading for Pleasure – Elaine Bales

Reading for Pleasure is a friendly group, meeting monthly to discuss a book chosen by one of the members. The choices vary widely.
Discussions are lively, and opinions often differ.
Part of the pleasure is in reading a book we may not have heard of, or would not have chosen ourselves, and finding it to be a real gem.
Bookworms can find out more from Elaine: ebales@talk21.com

Exercise – Pat Boyd

The Group meets most Mondays, 11-12 noon, in the Cheviot Centre. We practise various exercises and activities, mostly to music, to maintain our strength, mobility, balance and co-ordination. Some require small equipment such as resistance bands, balls or light weights. Others need concentration, memory and quick thinking. Most can be undertaken seated, with the support of a chair or moving freely. Safety is the first priority. We do laugh a lot. I am always happy to answer enquiries or questions.

Board Games – Maggie Harker

The group has expanded from five to eight and the Library continue to be happy with our presence as we gently compete to win at Scrabble, Tri-onimos, Rummikub or other games that members may bring along.

Philosophy for Fun – Maggie Harker

There has again been a small outflow and inflow of members, but the current membership is at its limit of 20. Although the questions change, our processes don't and we continue to discuss, deviate and digress!

Other Group Leaders spoke at the AGM, but did not provide written reports, so these are based on notes taken at the time. They emphasised the sociable aspects, as well as the chance to learn something new. All would be pleased to see new members join them.

Bridge – Andy Middleton
This group is thriving, and more experienced players are happy to help beginners. Andy stressed that, unlike some bridge clubs, Wooler u3a creates a "social evening with cards" atmosphere - including a tea and cakes break.

Table Tennis – Veronica Gilbert
This popular group now runs two sessions a week, and new members of all abilities are welcome. Veronica says it is a great way to have fun and keep fit at the same time.

Opera and Ballet – Veronica Gilbert
Each month, performances of an Opera and a Ballet are streamed onto her large screen, and range from the traditional to the very contemporary. Veronica holds these sessions at her own home, so numbers are limited; but members can call her, to reserve a place.

Art Appreciation – Bob Taylor
Bob and David Bull share the presentations at these informal sessions that cover a wide range of themes under the umbrella of Art, and members are invited to suggest topics. Bob is also ready to hand over the reins; and would like to hear from any member who could take this group on into the future.