

North East Open Studios

Minutes for NEOS AGM, 7th October 2018

Agenda:

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of AGM held on 8th October 2018
3. Matters Arising
4. Chairperson's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Co-ordinator's Report
7. Outgoing Committee Members
8. Request for New Committee Members
9. My NEOS Over 15 years – Susie Hunt
10. Any Other Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Ruth thanked everyone for coming to the AGM and said that 35 people had emailed apologies.

List of apologies available on request.

2. Minutes of AGM held on 8th October 2017

Ruth asked for approval of the minutes from the 2017 AGM. Ruth proposed the minutes and Carole Ruxton seconded.

A member requested that the minutes be sent with the AGM invite for 2019 so that they can be easily accessed by members.

3. Matters arising

None

4. Chairperson's Report

Ruth thanked the committee for their support, hard work and commitment over the last two years. Ruth said that the committee still had things to learn, but the group was very positive and had brought fresh ideas.

Ruth shared the following details of the NEOS year:

The year started when an early concern when Morag McGee resigned as Co-ordinator, but Louise Lemon quickly stepped into the role.

The committee agreed to focus on social media at members sign-up rather than paying for advertising and this had been successful with no impact on sign-up numbers. The sign-up campaign had been improved with interesting and fresh graphics provided by Linda Colquhoun.

Six sponsored places for the Year of Young People (YOYP) were offered and six YOYP artists and makers were selected and placed with members. Feedback from YOYP members was that they had enjoyed their NEOS experience and it had been both useful and helpful.

Pulling together members details for the NEOS book is a mammoth task and Ruth thanked Lily Taylor as membership secretary for her help. Louise handled issues with incomplete members entries. An issue with missing address lines was due to an error when data was merged and this is being investigated and fixed for next year.

The yellow book cover was retained as it links to the yellow NEOS signs. The 15-year anniversary was highlighted on the cover and the title of North East Open Studios describes the event more than 'NEOS' for new visitors.

Ruth thanked Phil for the NEOS book graphics and Linda Colquhoun for all other NEOS graphics.

When the NEOS book was ready, it was made available on-line and promoted through social media so that visitors were able to access the book, find 2018 members and start planning their NEOS visits.

In addition to the book, the committee decided to take part in the Portsoy Boat Festival to promote NEOS. Ruth thanked all those who took part and helped with set up. The location of the hall was away from the main festival area, but it had been worthwhile for promoting NEOS and visitor feedback was very positive. The committee will need additional support from members to organise, curate and set up additional events to promote NEOS in the future.

One of the key objectives for 2018 was to build the NEOS audience on Social Media and a tool called Hootsuite was used to promote NEOS across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The social media promotion started with YOYP in May, then moved onto promoting all members throughout the summer. This created a massive increase in visitors' numbers to NEOS social media.

Ruth asked members to support social media campaigns by sharing NEOS posts and using NEOS hashtags. Members were asked to keep in touch, share content about their practice and events to continue to keep NEOS social media interesting throughout the year.

NEOS was also promoted by an article in MMS magazine, large vinyls supported by Aberdeen Festivals and an interview with Susie Hunt on BBC Scotland.

In response to a request from last year to provide more support for first-time exhibitors, four members had volunteered to be NEOS reps. There had been a disappointing uptake on this option, but this may be because it is something new.

Funding was secured for member's videos and Ruth thanked all those who took part, especially Fiona Duckett for her hard work in applying for the funding, then co-ordinating the project.

Feedback from the visitors survey is unavailable from the Chamber of Commerce until the work is complete, however Ruth was able to share positive feedback from emails.

Fiona Crosswell put forward that NEOS should apply for ACSTA tourism award. Ruth and Fiona Duckett worked on this and NEOS is a finalist in the Best Festival category; a great achievement as NEOS is competing against funded festivals.

The NEOS objective for 2019 are:

- Improve the website and investigate on-line payments
- Provide a bigger and better map
- Build on social media success
- Get members more engaged and encourage members to read emails

To help build social media profile, there will be pop up events where members can improve social media knowledge, bring their device and share tips.

Ruth finished by thanking the committee and especially Fiona Duckett for their support over the last two years.

5. Treasurer's Report

Alun share the following:

The NEOS financial year is now from Sept to October and that draft figures are available at this time. Final figures will be available when final statements are received and checked.

The NEOS income for 2018 is £40,838 and after receipt of a £3000 grant payment from Aberdeenshire Council for members films, the NEOS bank balance is estimated to be £13,489.

There is no proposal to increase fees for 2019.

Electronic payment via the NEOS website will be investigated and work is required to ensure that the website is fit for purpose, however convenience of on-line payments will be more efficient. Charges for this payment method may mean increased members fees in future years.

The committee are investigating introducing a new membership category for artists and others who may not want to take part in NEOS but would like to be kept informed and be included in the members lists. A modest members fee will be suggested for this. Ruth

asked if members agree with this new option. Susie Hunt proposed, and Mary Taylor seconded.

6. Co-ordinator's Report

Louise Lemon shared her co-ordinators report and explained how she had taken over from Morag during sign-up. Louise confirmed the responsibilities of the co-ordinator.

The key items from her report are:

284 artists and makers signed up for NEOS 2018. This compared to 269 for NEOS 2017.

There was an Issue with Late/Incomplete entries and Louise recommended that a hard deadline be introduced for next year.

Louise also suggested that a new procedure be put in place for 'out of area' and group applications where more work is required, so that this didn't delay the sign-up completion.

A small percentage of members had issues uploading images and work will be done to improve error messages when images are uploaded.

To help with social media campaigns, it would be beneficial to have members' social media details

Louise finished by saying that overall there was some very positive feedback and hoped that the members experience was positive. Louise asked members to contact her if they have any suggestions that may help in the future.

The co-ordinators full report is available on the NEOS website.

Louise asked for any questions and a member asked about rules for groups. Ruth confirmed that the Terms and Conditions for groups is on the website and explained that only fully constituted groups can apply.

7. Outgoing Committee Members

Ruth said that she is stepping down as chair, Val is resigning as secretary and that Elaine Lindsay and Lily Taylor are resigning. Lily will continue to support the committee at sign-up.

Ruth said that Keith Mellard, Morag Smith, Kirsty McAbery and Jane Appelbee had resigned during the year.

8. Request for New Committee Members

Ruth said that new members are needed with fresh ideas and to help with the work load. Ruth said that the committee have had monthly meeting to move the committee to a positive place, but this may not be needed in the future.

Ruth proposed Fiona Duckett as new chair and all members agreed.

Ruth asked for a volunteer as vice chair. No volunteers came forward. Fiona Duckett said that Fiona Croswell had volunteered if there are no other volunteers for the post.

Ruth said that a secretary is still required and ask for volunteers. No volunteers came forward. Ruth asked for permission from members to appoint a secretary at the next committee meeting. All members agreed.

Fenneke Wolters-Sink, Erica Brammer, Jane Keenan and Emma Rodenhurst Grant volunteered and were proposed as new committee members by Fiona Duckett and seconded by Ruth. Fenneke and Erica were in attendance and Jane and Emma were proposed and seconded in their absence.

Susie Hunt suggested that the committee look at making the secretary a paid role. Ruth said this would be discussed by the committee.

Ruth proposed that committee expenses be paid as some committee members have travelling costs. All members agreed.

9. My NEOS Over 15 Years – Susie Hunt

Susie shared her experience of coming to Scotland 20 years ago and how it gave her the opportunity to review what she was doing creatively.

Susie said that prior to coming to Scotland, an open studios event in Surrey, curated by the local council, had introduced her to local artists and makers she had not known before. Previously her experience living in Norway had been pivotal, where the positive and supportive culture for artists had allowed her to build confidence. In Norway she had enjoyed the benefits of meeting people in other fields, collaborating, sharing work space and resources and starting a drop in workshop / art group.

When Susie arrived in Scotland in 2003, she didn't know anyone and approached an Aberdeenshire Council arts rep for permission to start an open studios event and although no financial support was given, the rep was encouraging and gave her time. Susie stalked craft and art shows to meet artists and makers. Susie didn't consider looking for funding and now feels that one of the strengths of NEOS is not having to report to a funder.

Susie said that the whole event works well and it is important not to react to small number of critics, who may have unreal expectations of what can be done. NEOS has developed year on year to attract an exceptional audience who are interested in art and the process.

Susie said that it is valuable to keep the event open and allowing for small groups can give artists courage to exhibit. The event should support and encourage artists and is not only about selling, as there are other opportunities for this. Sharing her venue at Mill Farm and hosting other artists has enhanced the experience and Susie was happy to have Kimberly Smith at NEOS 2018 as part of the YOYP initiative.

Susie said that fees for individuals and groups are good value and that NEOS benefits from having no funding body and no selection process and that the audience provides a selection process.

Susie said that there have been ups and downs over the last 15 years and the EGM was pivotal and members have benefited from the work that's been done over the last two years.

Susie hopes that NEOS will encourage creative entrepreneurs, as it is important for artists to have reasons to stay in Aberdeen. NEOS is a collective platform and #weareallNEOS.

Ruth thanked Susie on behalf of NEOS members.

10. Any Other Business

Ruth asked members for any questions.

A discussion was held about NEOS dates conflicting with other events, Open Doors, Aberdeen Art Fair, etc and how this may be impacting on visitor numbers. It was discussed that NEOS is in a large area and there will always be other events somewhere within the area. Ruth thanked the members for the comment and agreed to speak to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Council about the Open Doors Event.

A member asked if linking NEOS to a Monday holiday date would be beneficial. It was discussed that this has not always been successful in the past.

A member said that it would be useful when planning diaries for NEOS dates to be consistent week

Ruth said she wanted feedback on capping numbers, not because artists and makers are not welcome to join, but because organising NEOS for larger numbers will become unmanageable and there is also an issue with weight of the book if there are more than around 280 members. This will be done on a first come, first serve basis.

A member asked if NEOS shares information about available venues. It was confirmed that this information is shared by the co-ordinator during the sign-up period.

Ruth said that members can contact the committee using the info@northeastopenstudios.co.uk email address with any questions.

Ruth thanked members for taking time to come along to the AGM.