

NEOS AGM Minutes Sunday 6th October 2019 at 2pm

Balmanno Hall, Mannofield Church, Great Western Road, Aberdeen AB10 6UZ

The Chairperson, Fiona Duckett, welcomed the members to the meeting and thanked them for coming. She apologised for a slight delay in starting the meeting, due to an equipment problem. During this time she asked for any questions, of which there was one about visitor survey returns and where to return them to.

1. Apologies for Absence

A list of apologies are available. 35 members attended, including committee members. Apologies were also received from Roz Taylor of Business Gateway for being unable to attend.

2. Minutes of AGM held on 7th October 2018

Minutes were accepted, Erica Brammer proposed them, and Linda Colquhoun seconded them.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the previous AGM.

4. Chairperson's Report

First an apology from Roz Taylor of Elevator/Business Gateway – she is unable to come this afternoon – we only found out late on Friday afternoon so it was too late to ask anyone else – let's see how long the main business takes but we thought we could have an open chat about different aspects of Social Media.

Thank you

I'd like to start by thanking everyone on the committee a lot has been achieved this year, there's quite a few less of us as we say 'goodbye' to Karen (Hadjitofi) and Linda (Colquhoun) at the AGM - they've done amazing work over the last 3 years creating the map from scratch every year it's a big job with a very tight timeline so their efforts are very much appreciated. A huge thanks also to Simona Hunter who has done our first ever interactive online google map for the event. Ruth McEvelly, Fiona Crosswell, Carol Ruxton and Kerry Marr all resigned through the year and we thank them for their contributions. So that leaves 11 of us, 4 of whom have been on committee for 3 years – we need new people – but more of that later.

Thanks also are due to the other people who make this event happen Phil Thomson our book designer (and more). MMS Almac the NEOS book printers, they are hugely supportive of the whole event and also do the book delivery. Our new Web Designer Matt Robinson – who's patience with us non computer literate people is endless. I'd also like to add my personal thanks to Louise Lemmon – she's our coordinator but as Fiona Crosswell resigned at sign up has this year become the substitute Vice Chair in everything but name.

At this point I'd also like to say a huge '**thank you**' to **you** our lovely members because we all need each other – we are fundamentally a cooperative – working together for the good of everyone – often referred to in committee as 'the spirit of NEOS' when we are struggling to work out the direction we need to take! I think it would be fair to say that all of you here understand the spirit of NEOS or you wouldn't be here.

Being Chair for the last year has also meant I've learnt an amazing amount of things and Google has become my best friend as I struggle to work out how to do things that I wouldn't normally do in

my day to day life as a potter – give me a complicated glaze recipe any day over the ever changing world of Social Media! However having said that I would not have signed myself up for two Business Gateway classes but the extra impetus of being NEOS Chair spurred me on - so thank you for that too!

Social Media and Aberdeen Festivals

It's been a very different year as far as advertising is concerned as Aberdeen Festivals who had been formed with the backing of VisitAberdeenshire basically ceased to exist and so all the joint advertising that was done for the festivals no longer happened and it was up to individual Festivals to market themselves. So, like last year, we concentrated on Social Media. Ruth did an amazing job of growing our Facebook audience and the videos we made last year showed us all the power of moving images on both Facebook and Instagram. Did you know that multiple images are much more likely to be looked at on both platforms and videos even more so. But now your videos need to be subtitled as more and more people watch with the sound turned off!

At the end of NEOS last year our Facebook followers stood at 3,598 which was amazing as they started the year off at a little over 1,500. By then end of NEOS this year we now have 5,193 people following us and now have a totally different problem of how to keep them engaged throughout the quieter times!

The Social Media campaign started on 8th May with the sneak peek videos of all the disciplines (larger disciplines split into groups). I created the videos using your lovely images and iMovie (one of the courses I went on). Like anything, relatively simple once you know how. The reason for using just the images was you had not had a chance to proof-read your entries and we felt we couldn't share that data until you had. Because of the number of entries we needed to start the individual entries on the 25th May as it's recommended that you don't post more than 3 times a day on either Facebook or Instagram as people will unfollow you if you overload them and working back from the start of NEOS that was what the numbers said. We did a postcode meander around the whole of our area in a different order from last year. Just before NEOS we did the disciplines again but with number and name added as subtitles and we also had the 'What's new' for 2019 video with a new bit recorded and unused video footage from the videos last year which reached an amazing 23 thousand people – pretty sure most of them didn't watch it all the way through though! A couple who visited me, from Inverurie said that it was Facebook that made them aware of NEOS for the first time in 12 years.

Probably the biggest backhanded compliment (or headache) we had was that Instagram banned us for 3 days from doing anything on our own page as they suspected illegal activity because of the increase in likes and activity the week before NEOS and of course it's impossible to appeal or speak to anyone!!! Luckily they allowed us access or we don't know what we would have done. Louise did an amazing job reposting during NEOS. On Facebook all the posts that had tagged us and on Instagram reposting peoples stories that had tagged us on the NEOS Instagram story – and if all that is has just gone whoosh above your head then we will try and help later.

The Social Media team on the committee have come to the conclusion that we probably don't need to be posting on Twitter as it's not the right platform for what we are doing – it's much more about interactivity on current events – real or imagined and is one less thing that we need to do.

Business Gateway have been given money by the Scottish Government to help digitalise Scottish industry which means all the digital classes that are run by them are free at the moment – when I did them they were £25 a class so log on to Business Gateway and see what you can do for free! We did manage a Social Media Class at Boyndie Visitor Centre just before NEOS and hope to try and

organize another one, but really the best way to learn is to do it and maybe we just need to get together in social groups and help each other – food for thought?

Our Yellow Book

This is still the way that most of our visitors access the information about North East Open Studios and this year we had 29,000 books printed but we still had people begging for more and some members didn't even pick up their allocation, something everyone agrees to do when they sign up for NEOS. We aren't sure what to do about this – do you have any ideas?

Louise is going to say something about PUP's in her report but, our Pick up Points or PUP's are essential and on behalf of all of you I would like to thank them. When I first started in NEOS we all had to go to Susie Hunt's place near Kemnay to pick up our own box of books - so really we spoil you these days!

In case you missed it Phil did a lovely History of the NEOS covers from the beginning to the present day in the back of the book – well worth a read.

North East Open Studios at Turriff Show

Several of our members took advantage of the offer from Turriff Show to have stands in the new Arts and Crafts Marquee in a different location and NEOS also decided to do a 'hands on' event and start distribution of our book. The committee manned the stand over the two days and Fenneke Wolters-Sinke came up with the amazing origami Mazu box made out of last years books which everyone got hooked on making. I think it's fair to say we were not as busy as we thought we might have been but everyone enjoyed the event and the chance to get to know each other a little better. It also allowed us to interact with members of the public who hadn't really heard about NEOS. One to consider again for next year?

Print Advertising

We had a print advert in the Press and Journal for free this year as they never printed the one they should have done last year as part of Aberdeen Festivals – so that was a bonus. Sarah Mackie – a great advocate for NEOS talked to me and then produced a page in The Leopard, which is now part of Scottish Field. Lifestyle magazine asked for adverts for their magazine and several members took part – in return they gave us editorial and NEOS sponsored a £50 voucher to be spent at a NEOS venue. I know I got pieces about NEOS in the Banff Buzz and the Scottish Potters Magazine and locally Wool Engineering and Brian Angus featured in the Banffshire Journal. Nikki Bruce was featured in The Scottish Field as well.

Spirit of NEOS

Back to the Spirit of North East Open Studios: We are a cooperative of creative people who get together to make this event happen – we all agree to help and follow the guidelines when we sign up. I would strongly urge more of you to take a couple of days off and go and visit other fellow creatives not only in your area but also further afield. It's fascinating to see what other people do and how they create their own event. I always learn something by visiting other people and it also helps nurture my own creativity. The area for NEOS is now so large that I would also say to you all get together locally and support each other – a local hub is a powerful thing as has been shown by the amazing array of artist trail maps you've produced and shared with us on our website.

Personally I feel that NEOS has helped me find the other creatives locally that I might not have

been aware of and over the last 16 years we've gone from being just 2 of us on the Banffshire Coast to 28 of us with lots between here and Aberdeen which is all just brilliant! Well done everyone.

Any questions?

While I'm waiting can I remind everyone we need new making photos asap – it's good to have a library to call on – painting photos are especially rare – and before you say it's hard to do it and photograph it – that's the same for all disciplines! Get a friend or relative to take them of you and send them to me.

Questions were asked about “makers” photographs, what they are and what they will be used for. Fiona explained that they are used on social media to maintain interest in NEOS all year round, they are used in the book, on the cover and also in print advertising. Making photographs are images of the process of making not the end result – any of the processes that you think would be interesting. There was a question from the floor about having posters available to put up throughout the year. It was suggested that makers photos could be incorporated into posters on the NEOS website, which members could print themselves for local use.

5. Treasurer's Report

See report on Website

6. Coordinator's Report

For those of you that weren't here last year, my name is Louise and I'm your coordinator.

For those of you unsure of what the coordinator does, I have jotted down a list of a few responsibilities. Similarly to last year, if you have any queries with regards to any of these things, please feel free to ask me. I won't talk through the list, but if you need to refer to it in the future, it's attached to this report.

Coordinator responsibilities:

- All emails in and out of coordinator @ email address
- Assisting members with their applications during sign up
- Maintaining members database throughout sign up
- Organising and numbering database entries
- Proofreading (along with other committee members) of all members entries and catalogue.
- Coordinating between our Map Designers and Graphic Designer
- Editing (in line with Final Database) Members Entries on Wordpress
- Organising Pick Up Points and Book Distribution

Summary of Points for NEOS 2019:

- Membership
- Website Issues
- Late/Incomplete Entries
- Out of Area Applications
- Group Applications
- Images
- Pick Up Points

- Additional Information – Social Media handles

Full Report:

2019 Membership

A fantastic 318 artists and makers signed up to be involved in NEOS 2019. Compared to 284 for NEOS 2018. As a comparison, the only year we had more members was for our 10th Anniversary NEOS in 2013, where we had 322 Members.

158 members signed up within the first 2 weeks, with 120 signing up in the last week (including 16 members on the last day)

Website Issues

As we had to switch our service provider for our website, we encountered a lot of issues accessing the site when it came to sign up. Unfortunately there was nothing we could have done to prevent this.

Due to data being stored on home hubs and computers, anyone that had previously accessed our website (with the old website address) couldn't access it as they were automatically being taken to an outdated website.

As soon as historical data was cleared from computers, most of the issues were resolved.

There won't be further action required, as the website host will not be changing again. Hopefully!

Late/Incomplete Entries

In comparison to last year, we didn't have anywhere near the same amount of incomplete entries when we reached deadline day. We still had some 'almost finished' entries and 'unpaid' entries, but nothing compared to the previous year.

We usually have a small period of time set aside for people to complete submitted entries, which was sufficient enough time for everyone to complete their entries.

Out of Area Applicants

As in previous years, we welcomed some out of area artists invited by members within our designated area. We had a few "Out Of Area" Applicants this year not realising that there was an additional form to be filled out. Barring this slight confusion, there were no issues surrounding "Out of Area Applicants".

As out of area applications take additional processing time, the cut off is still 2 weeks into the signup period.

We will continue to focus on making all information as clear as possible on the website.

Group Applications

Similarly with Out Of Area applications, Group applications take a lot more administration. We didn't have a Members Secretary this year, which meant I had to keep track of the groups, and

organise the required documentation. There's a lot of information we require when it comes to entering as a group. These include having a constitution, AGM Meeting minutes and a list of group members.

My suggestions for next year would be to make it clearer on our website, what qualifies as a Group Applications, as we get a significant amount of emails such as:

- "My friends and I are thinking about entering as a group to save money"
- "What's the cheapest way to enter NEOS?"
- "If I want to share a venue with someone, does that mean we have to enter as a group?"

I would also suggest having a further volunteer looking after "Group Applications" during sign up so the Coordinator can continue to work through the main duties.

A further suggestion (**to be discussed later**) would be having a "Grandfather Agreement" with our established NEOS Groups, so that we don't have the administration during Sign Up, as we will hold all of the information required. We would only need an updated Group Members List.

Images

As discussed last year, we changed the parameters of the images for this year's entries. This significantly improved the process for members attaching an image to their application. There was still a small percentage of members having issues uploading images, but this was resolved after contacting us for help.

Pick Up Points

It was extremely hard and time consuming to find volunteers to be Pick Up Point's this year. Having Pick Up Point's is a vital part of North East Open Studios.

A suggestion going forward may be an additional "opt in" tick box when completing your application, so that we can collate the volunteers early on. This would save a lot of time.

Applications – Additional Information

Overall, we have had some very positive feedback, and we hope your entire NEOS experience was positive. We are always eager to evolve and take on board everyone's point of views and ideas.

If there is anything you feel may help us in the future, or if there are any issues you had out with the points I have raised above, please feel free to email me at: Coordinator@northeastopenstudios.co.uk

Thank you.

7. Request for New Committee Members including Vice Chair and Secretary (We will be down to 11 of a committee at the AGM)

Emma Rodenhurst-Grant, currently a committee member, volunteered to be Vice Chairperson.

Proposed by Fiona Duckett seconded by Erica Brammer

Ursula Thompson volunteered to come onto the committee – proposed Emma Rodenhurst-Grant seconded by Fiona Duckett

8. Proposals from the committee for discussion:

a) Limit the NEOS entrants to 300

Members were given the choice of voting for a limit of 300 members for the book, or having no limit, but paying more for their membership. Fiona explained that the book increases by increments of sixteen pages, which cost approx an extra £7000, which meant that even though we have increased income for a larger membership, this is eaten up by the cost of the book, and that we receive fewer books per box as a result of the size increase. All members voted to limit the size to 300, and to have entry on a 1st come, 1st serve basis.

b) Increase fees Single Adult membership to £135 (currently £130) Single Youth Membership £75 (currently £70) Small Constituted group for up to and including 6 participants £310 (currently £300) Large constituted group for 7 or over participants £415 (currently £400) Friends of NEOS £5 (currently £5) All members voted to accept the increase, Fiona Duckett proposed it and Ash Brammer seconded.

c) Increase the number of honorarium or more committee members needed to cover the jobs Jane McMillan from the floor suggested that there is a box to tick at sign up if members are willing to help but don't want to join the committee, this was felt to be a good idea and accepted.

d) Groups – Grandfather rights for established groups that have been in NEOS in this year (2019) and what the AGM agrees is needed from new groups who want to take part in NEOS Groups – NEOS needs to see a membership list each year plus any change in constitution. Members agreed, Hilary Duncan proposed and Hilary Firth seconded.

e) Introduction of a one off discount for members who have previously been part of a group and now want to take their own entry
Membership were against this suggestion and it was voted down.

f) Introduction of a £100 prize draw for members joining NEOS and paying within the first two weeks of sign up
Again, membership were against this policy and it was voted against.

g) Refund rules – currently we don't have any but if people drop out before the book goes to print then we usually refund but after the book has been printed this is more difficult and it is suggested that a £30 admin fee is taken.
Members felt £30 admin fee was generous, and also felt no refunds should be given after book has gone to print.

h) Chairperson should only be in position of a maximum of three years – this does not mean they have to serve for three years
this was agreed by members, with Fiona Duckett proposing and Ash Brammer seconding.

9. Any Other Business

Questions were asked about how many members were taking part in the Christmas pop up, to which the answer is 153 snowflakes in the book.

Date was set for NEOS 2020 as 12th- 20th September. Decisions on having another Christmas pop up will be made after this Christmas event.

A question was asked by someone from Delgattie Castle as to whether she could do the Christmas Pop up from her own Studio and use the yellow signs there. It was felt that this should be allowed, and that the website could be updated with their correct information.

Fiona once again thanked everyone for coming and invited everyone to partake of the refreshments.

10. Roz Taylor of Business Gateway/Elevator on how they can help new and established business. Unfortunately Roz was unable to attend – during refreshments and networking hands on ‘how to tag NEOS on Facebook’ etc took place.

11. Social with refreshments and networking!