

February 2021

Survey results and Member Link



74 of the 118 in the East Midlands responded to the survey that was sent out on December. Another 5 have completed it more recently. Most of our u3as reported that they have varying degrees of activity with just 11 saying they were completely in hibernation. This is very sad for the members of those u3as. The Member Link initiative has been launched to give thanks, support and encouragement to all u3as. Those that did not respond, or reported hibernation will be contacted as soon as possible by me or one of my team to see what support is needed. It is hoped that activity can be increased in all u3as, perhaps by running more groups online, or moving to holding monthly meetings virtually too. Many of us have been on a very steep learning curve with technology over the last year, but its use has made an enormous difference to our lives. The aim of Member Link is that every u3a will eventually be contacted. Many u3as in our region have coped incredibly well throughout this time but, in spite of this, a reduction of 17% of members is being predicted.

Recruitment, retention and u3a Day

We are fortunate that we now have a PR Adviser in our region. Chris Hartny-Mills has already been in touch with many u3as and is full of good ideas for how we can spread the word of all the benefits of u3a. Also, the extensive range of 'tools' to encourage the retention of existing members and the recruitment of new ones, will soon be available in the Sources area of the national website. These vary from finding more group organisers to enhancing your website.

June 2nd u3a Day – u3as are encouraged to plan whatever they can, whether it is virtual or actual events. Do let us find ways of spreading the word and celebrating all our movement does.

Our virtual life

It is becoming increasingly clear that there are many advantages to meeting online, and it is unlikely to stop when life returns to face to face contact. There could be members who are housebound but who would love to join meetings online, and it also opens up the possibility of members who could more easily join groups in other u3as. In Scotland an initiative has begun to do just that, which is a boon to those members in remote communities. There is also Trust u3a, that is entirely online and proving very popular.

Philosophy groups

I have a request from Tom Chamberlain, who has been running Philosophy groups for some time. He would love to be in touch with other people doing the same. Please contact him at: Tom Chamberlain tomnelli@aol.com
He is also offering 1-1 coaching in French pronunciation 01636 678571

High St Project

33 u3as are involved in the High St project, the highest regional number in the country. Nationwide more than 22,000 premises were surveyed by 537 members. The process will be repeated next September to see the impact of Covid 19. Even if u3as have not taken part there is nothing to stop you doing a local survey, though data will not be included in national results. Many u3as are also developing spin off projects about their high streets.

Third Age Trust

I know that a few people have been questioning why the Trust will still be asking for a member subscription this April. The truth is that the staff, Board members and volunteers have been busier than ever this last year. Below is a light hearted 'conversation' on this topic I thought I would share with you and hope you enjoy it! Apologies to the writer, as I have forgotten who it is!

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What has the Third Age Trust ever done for us?

Well, they provide loads of learning resources (soon via an online Learning Hub). They have 70+ designated Subject Advisers on all sorts of topics for Study Groups – everything from Amateur Radio to Yoga. They also do excellent summer schools and events in 'normal' years, too, open to all u3a and their members

Yeh, ok, but....

They send round a national e-newsletter on matters of interest and the doings of u3a and their members – sign up at: <https://www.u3a.org.uk/> And they publish Third Age Matters magazine which is delivered to your door for 0.62p an issue for a 90+ page really great magazine. And now they've started podcasts, produced by u3a members with experience in broadcasting!

Oh, and they give excellent advice on everything from finance (special workshops on that one!) to Covid – not only general advice, but answering specific problems when local u3a ask them.

They also create 'national' groups for things that local u3a might not have enough interest in or enough members to make a group viable – on writing, for example

Yes, but....

And they created a model constitution for local u3a which keeps us all legal and operating to best charity commission practice

They also do branding and marketing materials to help us present a lively and professional 'look', and attract new members

But do they help us with insurance?

Yes, they have national insurance policies which cover both the local u3a and also all the individual members when involved in any u3a activity. And all trustees have full Indemnity Insurance - including from the time they're a Steering Group forming a new u3a (oh yes, they also give a start up grant)

Also, for those local u3a that want to use it, they have a 'Beacon' system for managing membership, keeping records, and managing Study Group membership and activities

Is that all? Hmmmmm.....

Oh I forgot to mention that they help new u3a get set up and going, and they support regional/national networks of u3a so they can support and learn from each other

Any good in a crisis?

They've given great advice during Covid, both about being safe and what can be kept going, as well as providing high quality events on line available to all u3a and their members during the pandemic

Do they speak up for us 'oldies', tho'?

Yes they do, working with other charities and groups to make the case for aging well and gracefully!

Anything new on the horizon?

Two great new initiatives. One is branded merchandise – anything from pens to sweatshirts, branded with your u3a name or the name of your particular Study Group. AND a new Discounting Scheme which will easily save you double or more the cost of your u3a Annual Sub if you sign up and use it. Both coming soon.

Oh ok, I give in! Maybe it is a good idea to have a Third Age Trust to support all the local u3a, and maybe it is good value for money for the amount we pay....