

Association of East Midlands U3As

Proposals for Going Forward in the East Midlands Region

In the past the Region has tended to direct and organise events within the Network through a Regional Education and Development Officer. However, the continuing expansion and growth of the U3A movement means that it is becoming increasingly impractical for the Region to continue to fulfil these activities completely through the offices of one individual.

It has been suggested that it would be more cost effective in terms of time and money to organise events through Networks, reserving significant topics for truly Regional workshops (an example would be the Treasurers and Groups Co-Ordinators' workshop to be run in October 2015). There has already been more grass roots input from the Networks, each of which has developed, or is in the process of developing, its Network Development Strategy. To achieve this change in operational responsibilities it is important that the structure and communications that are in place between the Region, the Network, the Network's Development Team and the constituent U3As must be clear, well defined and understood. This we hope to achieve through the Network and Regional Development strategies.

This document sets out to put this understanding in place for the Association of East Midlands U3As and is done on the basis that the organisation operates with both an executive and a constitution.

East Midlands Region Organisation Structure

The Role of the Region

Shortly after the Regional EDO stood down at the AGM in 2014, the Third Age Trust launched its Three year Plan, **Going Forward 2014-2017**, at the 2014 Conference and AGM and clearly identified the role of the Networks:

“The better informed the U3A, the better they will be able to take speedy action and make decisions to benefit the membership. However, focusing on individual U3As would be time-consuming so we will actively encourage them to join their local network or a small grouping of U3As so that we can help more people more quickly. . . . the logic of talking to more people at the same time is inescapable in terms of gaining common understanding and encouraging local U3As to build even stronger links between each other.”

The role of each Network can therefore be seen as a vehicle to:

- Encourage existing U3As
- Share best practice
- Maintain good two-way communication between the Network and its U3As
- Find appropriate Regional Representatives and Volunteers
- Maintain a proactive relationship with the Regional team.
- Identify and help start new U3As (in conjunction with the Development Team)
- Publicise U3As, Network and Regional events and the Third Age Trust
- Contribute to the Network website
- Provide a forum for discussion and networking

The Role of the Regional Development team

The Development Team is a team selected from RRC members, known as the Development Sub Committee. Ideally all team members would be trained to Regional Volunteer standard but this is not essential for the regional team.

Going Forward speaks about the need for ongoing training at a national level to ensure that standards are implemented and maintained across the U3A movement and members are kept up to date. The Regional Development Team will investigate and then implement suggestions coming from their Networks through the member U3As. The Team will maintain a sufficient level of knowledge of the ethos of the U3A movement, its Guiding Principles and Charity Commission regulations in order to:

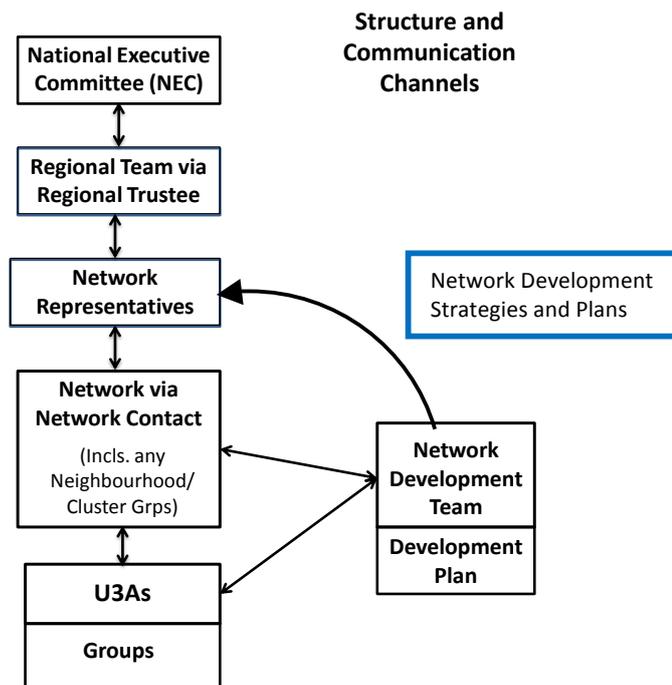
- Organise regionally based events wanted by U3As such as Summer Schools, Seminars, Workshops, and Study Days and Weekends.
- Maintain and develop relationships with other regional agencies, such as the Open University.
- Support U3As and County Networks in their work; specifically in setting up new U3As and helping U3As in their operation and supporting U3A learning.
- Develop and review regional policies and plans, where appropriate.
- Develop means of communication with U3As and Networks including maintaining a distinctive website.
- Establish working parties to undertake specific tasks.
- Produce a Development plan to include information from the Network and from Regional and National committees

Relationship with the Region, the Regional Trustee & Assistants to the Trustee

As mentioned previously the growth of the U3A movement has meant that the Regional operation has by necessity had to change and evolve to meet the increased demands. These changes are briefly summarised below with reference to how they will impact on the networks.

The scope for Regional Development will be undertaken by the Regional Trustee in conjunction with the Regional Development Team and will then be agreed by the Regional Representative Council (RRC). The Assistants to the Trustee will each work closely with the Regional Trustee and agreed Network Development teams to produce and implement Network Development plans and to assist in the setting up of new U3As agreed by the Network Development teams.

Below is a chart “Structure and Channels of Communication” that shows the relationships within the U3A structure.



It is essential that with these changes good communication is maintained throughout the organisation. By doing this we can ensure that good ideas, best practice and future projects are captured at both the Regional and Network level and can be disseminated to the U3A themselves.

Development Strategies

The following outline the proposals for the Education, Development and Support for Existing U3As and for Developing New U3As.

Education, Development and Support for Existing U3As

There are a number of areas where education and support can be provided, in conjunction with the Development Team, and form part of the Development Plan:

- Workshops geared towards improving the performance of U3As (Committee members, Groups Co-ordinators and Group Leaders, Treasurers). Grants are available from the Third Age Trust for workshops attended by U3As from at least 5 U3As.
- Providing communication forums for peer groups: it appears that committee members and interest group leaders would welcome discussions with their peers to share ideas, experience and materials. These meetings would be informal and the province of U3As in a Network, but incorporating some structure would allow extra benefit to be derived from the initiative.
- In Depth study groups: often undertaken by single U3As where a member has proposed a topic for study. Sharing outcomes could increase the number of projects undertaken and encourage U3As to work together on them.
- The Networks and their U3As should encourage members to think about Shared Learning Projects (SLPs) as part of the Development programme. The Regional SLP Co-Coordinator will be able to assist here.
- Study Days can be run by a single U3A, by a group or indeed a Network. However, Study Days are for the benefit of individual members and must be self-financing.

Developing new U3As

The growth of U3A is clearly stated as part of the guiding aims i.e.:

- To make U3As accessible to all people in their Third Age.
- To encourage the establishment of U3As in every part of the country where conditions are suitable and to support and collaborate with them.

All U3As should ensure that they publicise the movement and be prepared to assist in every way possible with membership growth and proposed formation of U3As in their areas. The Development Team in conjunction with the Network will identify suitable locations, agree and plan new U3As.

Reasons for new U3As

There are various reasons for setting up new U3As:

- Bringing a U3A to an area which has never had one
- Responding to requests from a particular community
- Developing a U3A to relieve pressure on existing U3As
- Re-launching a U3A which is in serious decline

Key criteria for new U3As will include:

- Demographics
- Local sensibilities
- Resources

To achieve a successful start-up of a new U3A the Network Development Teams will follow the planning guidelines drawn up by National Office and work closely with the Regional Trustee, the Regional Development Team and all adjacent U3As.

Development Plan

The development strategies will be documented in the Network's 3 year Development Plan by the Development Team. They will be responsible for maintaining and updating the plan and for progressing the various projects with assistance from appropriate volunteers drawn from the Network. The Network will review the plan and project progress at their regular meetings.

Proposal

In light of the above, the following are proposed:

- That the position of a Regional Education and Development Officer should be removed from the Constitution
- That the Constitution be reviewed to accommodate the above proposal and the changes which are taking place in the Networks
- That the RRC should be renamed the East Midlands Regional Committee to remove the bureaucratic overtones of the current title.

Vision & Mission Statement

Appendix 1

Our Vision

Our Vision is to make lifelong learning, through the experience of U3A, a reality for all third agers.

Our Mission

Our Mission declares our purpose as an organisation and serves as the standard against which we weigh our actions and decisions. It is to:

- Facilitate the growth of the U3A movement.
- Provide support for management and learning in U3As.
- Raise the profile of the U3A movement.
- Promote the benefits of learning in later life through self-help learning.

The Principles of the U3A Movement

The U3A movement is non-religious and non-political and has three main principles:

The Third Age Principle

- Membership of a U3A is open to all in their third age, which is defined not by a particular age but by a period in life in which full time employment has ceased.
- Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a U3A.
- Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a U3A can do so.

The Self-help Learning Principle

- Members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire; by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards.
- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers; they are all U3A members.

The Mutual Aid Principle

- Each U3A is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent but a member of The Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the guiding principles of the U3A movement.
- No payments are made to members for services rendered to any U3A.
- Each U3A is self-funded with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.
- Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the U3A movement