

The Principles of the u3a Movement

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.

Future Strategy

Towards the end of 2021, over 3000 individual u3a members expressed a broad range of opinions and ideas about a strategy for the u3a movement via emails, focus groups and a survey.

It was clear that the core principles underpinning the u3a movement remain key to our future success and will continue to be integral going forward. These include peer to peer learning and a focus on member-led activities, as well as the fundamental value of u3as, and its volunteer base.

From the wealth of discussion and feedback received, the Strategy Working Group has developed a 2-part approach comprising short term and long-term focus areas. In this way, important work can continue in the short-term, whilst we can take more time to develop the details of the longer-term focus areas.

Immediate priorities for 2022 will include providing more advice to u3as and developing the national online learning programme such as tutorials and talks, which have proved popular during lockdown.

The focus over the next few years will include working with other organisations to promote our values and to get our name and purpose better known. This is also an opportunity to redefine what the u3a stands for and make sure that the movement is attractive to younger recruits as well as ensuring that members feel part of a bigger movement – a 'u3a family'.

Over the coming months, u3a members will be invited to share ideas and thoughts through committees and consultation programmes.

If you have any further questions or comments about the strategy, please email strategy@u3a.org.uk.