

## **Crawley u3a Communications Strategy: November 2022**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 This strategy will explore how we communicate on two fronts: internal communications with our members and external communications with others. It will show how we can improve communications with members and introduce methods we can employ to promote and publicise the u3a, raising public awareness of our existence and attracting new members in the process. At all times we will seek to be clear and consistent.

### **2. Internal communications**

2.1 We generally communicate with our 560 members (at the time of writing) by email and newsletter, sent via Beacon. However, we need to bear in mind that there are approximately 43 members who do not have, will not or cannot use email; this represents around one-eighth of our membership.

2.2 Communications to new or prospective members must also be factored into communications.

#### Frequency of communications

2.3 This breaks down into three categories: electronic communications, postal communications, and verbal communications.

2.4 The Communications Co-ordinator sends out Monthly Newsletters via email. Members also receive Quarterly Newsletters both electronically and by post for those without email.

2.5 The Quarterly Newsletter is sent out as follows: an autumn newsletter is mailed to those without email with the membership renewal forms, which saves on postage costs. Over the course of the rest of the year, a newsletter after Christmas, one in the spring and a summer one are produced.

2.6 A timetable of when the Newsletters will be produced and dispatched has been drawn up by the Communications Co-ordinator to give structure to the process, with the aim of sending them out on the first Monday of the month.

## Centralising distribution of the Bulletins and Newsletters

2.7 After consultation with the Membership Secretary, the Communications Co-ordinator will take over the printing and distribution of the postal copies of the Quarterly Newsletters. The aim is to start this new process no later than the beginning of 2023. This will have the effect of centralising all communications within the Communications Team.

## Content of newsletters

2.8 The current format of the newsletter has proved effective. Suggested additions are set out below:

- Welcoming new members by name, which has been done in the past (done for November 2022 newsletter)
- Items featuring a few groups at a time in the Monthly and Quarterly Newsletters, particularly where attendance needs boosting. This will comprise a paragraph or two on what the group does as well as a photograph if possible
- A committee report explaining the main matters considered over the past three months, to be written by the Secretary
- A write up on the Open Afternoon for those not attending groups to be posted on the website (done for 2022)
- Short interviews with older members (relaxed seniors) asking them what attracted them to the u3a in the first place, the groups they used to belong to, what they remember most, and even about their lives in general (such as why they came to Crawley in the first place)

2.9 The Communications Co-ordinator, in consultation with the Groups Co-ordinator, will explore whether more Group Leaders would be happy to provide brief updates on their groups' activities on a regular basis. However not all of them may wish to do this, nor is it desirable to add to their burden. The Communications Co-ordinator plans to visit as many Groups as possible, having cleared it with the Group Leader beforehand, take photos (as long as everyone grants permission, making it clear to all concerned where the photos will be used) and write a short piece for the Newsletter as a means of featuring the group.

## Keeping in touch with members without email (including verbal communications)

2.10 Aside from ensuring that members without email receive quarterly newsletters, listed below are other ways which could be employed to improve communications with them:

- Asking if a relative or neighbour has email and could pass on information. According to the membership secretary, this is already happening
- The use of noticeboards re-commenced at September's Open meeting, and they will henceforth be displayed at the monthly meetings, showing dates of forthcoming meetings, outings, advertising groups who are short of members, etc. Spare copies of the latest newsletter will be made available by the noticeboards so that members without email can take a copy away with them to read
- Training: for some members without email and/or the internet, this is a conscious decision they have made. However, for others it may be a case of technophobia, in which case it might be worth asking for a few volunteers who would be willing to give short one-to-one group training sessions for a few members on how to access the internet and set up and use email
- Both the Secretary and Membership Secretary have suggested that the Quarterly Newsletters could be delivered in person, thus giving the opportunity to have a chat with members without email in person. The Membership Secretary has also suggested that volunteers from walking groups might like to deliver Quarterly Newsletters in their areas to canvass feedback and opinion on the type of content together with an opportunity for a brief chat. The Communications Co-ordinator has compiled a list of those without email with a view to organising delivery by hand of the newsletter where possible

### Crawley u3a website

2.11 The Secretary and the Communications Co-ordinator are in the process of making changes to the website, being careful to follow the u3a branding guidelines. This is not something which can be done overnight, rather something which will be achieved gradually.

### Social media

2.12 Other than the website, the following could be used to communicate with our members:

- Crawley u3a Facebook page. Although approximately one-quarter of our members are on this page, the Communications Co-ordinator posts a few days before an event, reminding members of the date, time, and location. The newsletter is being used to encourage people to join the Facebook page and look at it regularly for the latest news. We need to encourage more Group Leaders to post photos on the page, along with a short account of where they have been and what they have done
- WhatsApp – this is a useful means of communicating within groups. Several outdoor groups find it an invaluable way to keep in touch when there is a last-minute change of plan. It may have less value for the indoor groups. However, Painting and Drawing Group members use it to share pictures of their artwork and holiday photos. The Group Co-ordinator's advice will be sought on how many outdoor groups use it. This is not something which is viewed as essential for indoor groups, unless Group Leaders are keen to use it

### Crawley u3a leaflet

2.12 The leaflet needs to be amended before reprinting. The Membership Secretary has suggested that it may be worth considering two types of leaflet: one for the general public in order to encourage them to join the u3a and a second one geared to social prescribing support after bereavements – 'when you are ready' type of information.

### Crawley u3a Members' Handbook

2.13 The Membership Secretary sees this as information not advertising as separate sheets of this document updated with the latest changes are sent to new members, something she does not wish to do in colour.

### **3. External communications**

3.1 This section examines how we can publicise the u3a, not only with a view to gaining new members, but also exploring how best to present ourselves to non u3a members.

3.2 The following could offer ways of doing so:

- developing links with the wider community to raise awareness of Crawley u3a
- exploring links with other organisations providing services for older people
- exploring links with other organisations, e.g., schools
- assisting in company pre-retirement planning and redundancy support courses

3.3 However, it was felt that the time and energy needed may not be worth the results unless we target the same audience, e.g., Probus, church or religious organisations day-time groups, bowls clubs and even that may not prove fruitful.

#### Publicity

3.4 Listed below are suggestions on where Crawley u3a could be publicised:

- local newspapers such as the Crawley Observer, providing them with an article or sending them a press release when there is a special event planned
- monthly free magazines which come through the letterbox such as RH Uncovered and Crawley South pages as well as Crawley Live, although cost could be a factor in the first two instances
- social media, e.g., Facebook, discussed under internal communications
- local Facebook neighbourhood/residents pages. This proved successful in advertising the Open Afternoon, posts on the Pound Hill and Furnace Green sites attracting some interest. Other committee and u3a members could do likewise with their own neighbourhood sites
- distribution of leaflets
- posters: consider redesigning, subject to cost
- word of mouth: encouraging members to tell their friends and neighbours about the u3a

## Advertising

3.5 More time is needed for ways to advertise to be explored. Distributing leaflets and putting up posters are two ways to advertise. Consideration should also be given to advertising in the free magazines although cost is a factor.

## **4. e-mails from public bodies**

4.1 In the first instance, correspondence from all organisations outside of the Third Age Trust, such as companies, other charities, and semi-public bodies such as universities, should be directed to the Secretary.

## **5. Communications Sub-Committee**

5.1 A Communications Sub-Committee will be set up (to replace the website one). It will enable discussions on communications matters to take place away from Committee meetings although regular reports on the discussions taking place during such meetings will be made to the Committee. It is important that the Strategy is reviewed regularly in order to ensure that the actions contained therein are being carried out and that it remains fit for purpose.

## **6. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**

6.1 The Third Age Trust (TAT) encourages u3as to use a variety of methods and platforms to publicise the u3a, which need to be borne in mind when we embark on raising the profile of our u3a

6.2 Accessibility of communications to members without access to the internet has been covered in paragraph 2.10 (keeping in touch with members without email)

6.3 Accessibility of meeting venues must be tackled. This will be done by assessing the accessibility of venues used for Group meetings and placing details on the Groups page on the website so that members will know in advance how accessible a building is to use, with details of on-site parking, toilets, etc. The Communications Co-ordinator has started work on this

6.4 During the course of the website redesign, care must be taken to use a range of images which reflect the local community

If you have any ideas or suggestions you would like to feed in then please do not hesitate to contact the Communications Co-ordinator at the email address shown at the end of this document.

In conclusion, these are initial thoughts on what can be done to improve both internal and external communications. The external communications section is by no means the finished article. Internal communications is the first area to be tackled. However, a revised website and leaflet will feed into external communications: how we present ourselves to members and non-members. Above all, we must not forget that our members are our priority, at the heart of all that we do.

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