

BY PAUL MARTINEZ, FORMER CHAIR OF THE u3a RECRUITMENT WORKING GROUP

Don't be daunted by chance to take on a committee role

There was a great article by Barrie Gunter (TAM, Winter), reminding us how important it is to ensure that u3a members take an active part in running their u3a.

All too often, appeals for new committee members are made along the lines of 'It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it'. But there are lots of potential benefits to being a committee member.

These include working with others to achieve a shared goal; developing new skills; making and deepening friendships; a sense of achievement; and, of course, enjoyment and having fun.

Members may have all sorts of misconceptions about what is involved in being on the committee. The best way of dispelling such myths is by letting members see what their u3a is actually doing, such as with 'ask the committee' sessions at general meetings, personal accounts from committee members in newsletters, and inviting members to observe committee meetings.

There is a wide consensus that personal approaches are much more effective than generalised appeals in newsletters or at general meetings. Some u3as have

created developmental opportunities, partly to be able to offer support to new committee members, partly to make the task less daunting and partly to enable new committee members to grow into the role.

This can take a number of forms, such as shadowing, apprentice or assistant roles; co-options without a specific role (to begin with); and involvement of members in task groups and sub-committees.

Team approaches to committee roles help to overcome possible nervousness about the amount of commitment or knowledge required.

We all need to have a bit of fun – after all, it's in our u3a strapline!

Before the Covid pandemic struck, I surveyed a number of u3as which had grown their membership over several years. I contacted them to ask what the secret of their success had been.

Quite spontaneously, a significant number of them attributed the success of their u3a to a mixture of nurturing their committee team and having some fun.

Each of the u3as had their own distinct ways of doing so, such as thank-you meals and



Ravenshead u3a, in Nottinghamshire, recruiting last year

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by recognising and acknowledging individual contributions.

Others focused on efficient, streamlined, well-prepared and well-conducted meetings, fostering a collaborative and collegiate approach, and capitalising on individual strengths and skills.

There is a wealth of information and guidance in the Recruitment Toolkit, which is available on the u3a website under the 'Support for u3as' tab, and includes guides

on making your committee bigger and better; recruiting more interest group leaders; developing a shared approach to recruitment; and building support for recruitment in your committee.

● The Trust runs online workshops covering a range of topics to support those running their u3a and those interested in joining a committee. To find out more, go to u3a.org.uk/advice/workshops