

KU3A Development Plan: Written Report on Objective 1

Objective 1: Identify aspects of best U3A practice – nationally, regionally and locally – with a view to emulating these within KU3A if appropriate.

1.1 Actions: Scrutinize National U3A Objects & Principles to identify useful prompts for action in the KU3A context.

What I've done below in paragraphs 1.1.1-1.1.14 is simply to scour the original national *Objects and Principles* document, which is *not* a well-structured text, and to use a substantial amount of direct quotation to pick out aspects that might be food for further thought and action. Much of the national document now sounds very 'dated' in both style and content, to be honest, but I've tried to capture its themes and values accurately.

Interestingly, paragraph 1.1.15 below reproduces in full the new *Vision and Mission* statement now available on the new National Website. In my view, this new and succinct statement is a vast improvement on the previous and overlong *Objects and Principles* document.

1.1.1

We should note the various words used to describe the range of "activities" or "topics" organized by U3As: *educational, creative, leisure, academic, practical, recreational, intellectual, cultural, aesthetic.*

1.1.2

"Most local U3As offer a combination of opportunities to study, create, socialise, and contribute greatly to members' overall health and well being".

1.1.3

"Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a U3A".

1.1.4

"The curriculum of the university shall be as wide as resources permit...the preference of members will be the only criterion of what is done...members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire".

1.1.5

Note the continuous emphasis on "sharing" knowledge, skills, experience and activities in a "learning cooperative".

1.1.6

“To educate British society at large in the facts of its present age constitution and of its permanent situation in respect of ageing” ... “To undertake research on the process of ageing in society and especially on the position of the elderly in Britain and the means of its improvement” ... “Studies related to the specific institution of the elderly – social, psychological, physiological” ...

1.1.7

“Strong emphasis will be laid on research in all the university’s activities...Every member will be expected, where possible, to have a research project of her or his own, and to write up its results.”

1.1.8

“To make those in their later years in Britain aware of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic potentialities, and of their value to themselves and their society. ***To assail the dogma of intellectual decline with age.***”

1.1.9

“The undertaking of all members to teach as well as to learn may be fulfilled in the following ways other than instruction: counselling other members; taking the university’s offerings into the homes of the housebound, the bedridden, those in retirement institutions or in hospitals; helping the effort to provide intellectual stimulus for the mass of the elderly in Britain; taking part in any other offer of manpower made by the university and educational or cultural institutions which stand in need of it.”

1.1.10

“In pursuance of the aesthetic, art historical and topographical interests known to be popular with the type of student likely to be a member of the university, special arrangements shall be sought with national bodies such as the Arts Council, the National Trust, the Department of the Environment, the Nature Conservancy and the Forestry Commission, so as to obtain the facilities required to develop instruction and research in these fields.”

1.1.11

“Special importance shall be attached to physical training and suitable supporting activities and negotiations entered into for these purposes with local institutions disposing of these facilities.”

1.1.12

“The closest possible collaboration shall be maintained with the extramural boards of universities, with WEA and with all providers of adult education programmed in each area.”

1.1.13

“Though the conventional taught ‘class’ will often be the form (of teaching/learning) adopted, every encouragement will be given to seminars with many participants; readings; activities to sites of scientific, archaeological or historic interest, museums, art collections, houses and so on.”

1.1.14

“Every effort shall be made to encourage interchange with U3As at home and abroad, to exchange teaching with them, to collaborate on research with them; to unite with them in the furtherance of intellectual interests of the elderly, especially in Britain.”

1.1.15

STOP PRESS: NEW ‘Vision and Mission’ Statement Found on the new U3A National Website, reproduced in full directly below.

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 organization 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.*

1.2 Actions: Survey local, regional and national U3A group websites to compare general *modus operandi* and activities offered in order to identify further possible areas for KU3A future development.

N.B. Please see the Grid and Commentary set out in the accompanying paragraphs below.

National Subject Advisers	K	WD	SoA	BC	COV	SOL
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American Archaeology						
Archaeology						
Architecture		✓				
Art Appreciation	✓	✓			✓	
Astronomy						
Aviation						
Ballroom Dancing		✓			✓	
Biology						
Bridge	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
British History		✓				✓
Canasta	✓	✓			✓	
Classical Greek						
Climate Change						
Crafts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Creative Writing	✓	✓	✓			
Cryptic Crossword						
Crown Green Bowling		✓			✓	✓
Current Affairs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cycling		✓				
English Folk Dance	✓	✓				
Exploring World Faiths						
Film	✓	✓		✓		✓
French	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Gardening	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Genealogy	✓			✓		
German	✓	✓	✓			
Geology/Earth Science						
ICT Awareness		✓				✓
Jazz Appreciation	✓	✓		✓		
Languages	✓	✓	✓			
Latin		✓	✓			
Living History				✓	✓	✓
Mah Jong	✓			✓		
Maths & Stats						
Military History						
Mindfulness & Meditation		✓				
Music Appreciation (Classical)	✓		✓		✓	
Music – Singing & Playing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Opera		✓				
Painting & Drawing Techniques	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Petanque	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Philosophy		✓		✓	✓	
Photography	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Play Reading	✓					✓
Poetry	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Psychology			✓			
Puppetry						

National Subject Advisers	K	WD	SoA	BC	COV	SOL
Racketball						
Research						
Russian		✓				
Sailing & Water Activities						
Science		✓				✓
Shakespeare					✓	
Sociology						
Stage Production						
Storytelling						
Theology						
Welsh Language						
Wine Appreciation			✓			
Yoga						

Commentary

1.2.1

The February 2018 edition of *Third Age Matters* lists the National Subject Advisers for 60 Interest Groups, as printed in the first column of the grid. I have completed the grid to show which of these Subjects are actually offered locally by Kenilworth, Warwick District, Stratford, Balsall Common, Coventry and Solihull U3As. It is significant that a third of the Subjects (21/60) are not offered by any of these 6 local areas, seemingly indicating a substantial divergence between national and local thinking regarding appropriate subjects for Interest Groups. Why is this? Does it matter?

1.2.2

This divergence is further illustrated by the many and varied Interest Groups offered by these 6 local U3As to address Subjects that do not occur on the list of National Subject Advisers. I list all such local Interest Groups area by area in paragraph *1.2.4* below. It is significant that a number of these Interest Groups (e.g. Books, Dining/Lunching, Outdoor Sports, Rambling/Walking, Scrabble, Theatre Visits) are offered by a number of the U3As, thus reinforcing the idea of a national/local mis-match in thinking regarding appropriate subjects for Interest Groups.

1.2.3

Equally, several U3As have developed Groups that address an interest that is unique to that area's members (e.g. Tai Chi, Handbell Ringing, Walking Football). It's clear that the interests of knowledgeable and enthusiastic individual members in any given U3A will always provide opportunities to generate Groups, but such specific interests cannot be simply transferred to another U3A. The point is to encourage our own members to explore and share their own interests with others to see if a Group can be launched.

1.2.4

Kenilworth: Book/Reading Groups; Croquet; Scrabble; Social Lunch; Table Tennis; Theatre Visits; Walking; Weekend Outings.

Warwick District: Indoor Games; Active Listening to Music; Book Club/Group; Cacophony; Food, Wine & Dine; Outdoor Games; Rambling/Walking Groups; Curry Club; Good Eating Lunch Group; Lip Reading; Natural History; Line Dancing; Saturday Lunch Group; Scrabble; Table Tennis; Sunday Club; Tennis.

Stratford-upon-Avon: Keep Fit; Steel Pans; Book/Reading Group; Church Visiting & Heraldry; Ukulele.

Balsall Common: Swimming; Diplomacy; Political/Social History; Ramblers; Big Band; Scrabble; Book Groups; Music Appreciation; Out & About; Lunch Group; Coffee & Chat; Walking Football.

Coventry: Cottage Cookery; Gents' International Dining; Ladies' International Dining; Pitch & Putt; Rambling Groups; Holidays; Ladies Who Lunch; Tai Chi.

Solihull: Handbell Ringing; Book Lovers' Group; Rummikub; Walking Group; Gelotology (Science of Humour); International Dining; Lunch Club; Movement & Dance; Online Study Group; Theatre Group.

1.2.5

The completed grid quickly enables us to identify particular gaps in our KU3A provision. Why is a certain activity, e.g. Philosophy, popular elsewhere locally but not in KU3A? Why do we not have a Science Interest Group? Should we actively seek to set up a Philosophy Interest Group and a Science Interest Group? What would be the best way of achieving that? Or should we look for alternative ways of providing Philosophy and Science for our members rather than setting up Interest Groups?

1.2.6

The final point to make is that it would be valuable to share all the above information with our own members and with the other local U3As in order to promote discussion about possible actions to improve the breadth of local provision.

1.3 Actions: Refer to National Research Database, *U3A Sources* And *Third Age Matters* to identify further possible areas for KU3A future development.

1.3.1

The first point to make here is that we should review and discuss the latest editions of *U3A Sources* and *Third Age Matters* as a regular Agenda Item at the next Committee Meeting after their publication. In this way, we would keep abreast of national U3A news, events and developments and we would be able to relate them to our own context on a continuous basis. I think it is important that we sustain and reinforce the existing U3A communications networks, and this is one small but positive way in which we can achieve that.

1.3.2

The U3A Research Database is an interesting source of ideas, now containing brief details of 750 'research projects' nationally. These include research by individual U3A members, research by U3A groups, research carried out by a U3A in collaboration with another body such as a local university, museum, gallery or library, and, lastly, participation by U3A members in externally-led research. There is a wide range of topics on the Research Database, but I remain sceptical about whether or not we would want to promote what still appears to be a rather traditional approach to 'research'.

1.3.3

The latest edition of *U3A Sources* (February 2018) has a short article (see page 17) by Jennifer Simpson, U3A National Shared Learning Project Coordinator, but her description of a 'Shared Learning Project' strikes me as unnecessarily narrow and limiting.

1.3.4

I could be wrong, but in my view we have moved on in KU3A to re-define the idea of a 'Shared Learning Projects', exemplified by initiatives such as "Living in the Online World" and "The Ideas Café". Different as these two initiatives are in many ways, they have both been set up as learning 'events' rather than as 'research', enabling us to invite members to attend on the day without a longer-term commitment.

1.4 Actions: Contact other local U3A groups directly to identify opportunities for active, future collaboration.

1.4.1

We should take immediate, positive steps to strengthen and sustain links between KU3A and the other U3As in the region, playing a full part in establishing an informal but effective local network. This would enable us to share ideas on all aspects of our work, to promote each other's events and to collaborate on setting up joint initiatives. Such a network could operate on-line between U3A Committee Members carrying out specific roles (e.g. Publicity Coordinators or Speakers Secretaries) or it could set up actual meetings to enable specific Committee Members (e.g. Membership Secretaries or Treasurers) to share good practice.

1.4.2

We should make full use of the West Midlands U3A Region website (I didn't know it existed until recently!) to promote our events and to glean further information about U3A news and activities across the region. The West Midlands U3A Region is made up of 6 areas (Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire and West Midlands), incorporating 85 local U3As; the West Midlands U3A Region website lists and provides direct access to the websites of all these local U3As, so it has the potential to be a powerful instrument for us.

1.5 Actions: Send a delegate to annual National AGM and Conference.

1.5.1

This Action speaks for itself, but we should extend it to apply to the Regional Conference and to any EGM. It is imperative that KU3A plays a full part in the representative structures of the U3A if we are to see ourselves as a forward-looking, participatory group.

1.5.2

The KU3A Committee should agree to pay 'reasonable expenses' for a representative to attend any of the events noted in *1.5.1* above.

1.5.3

The KU3A representative attending any of the events noted in *1.5.1* should provide a written report on the event's proceedings to the Committee. The written report should be reprinted in the KU3A Newsletter as a matter of course.

DGH/March 2018