

# LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND NETWORK OF U3As

## PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION

### Introduction

The Leicestershire and Rutland Network of U3As is a collective organisation of all U3As within the geographic area and is a constituent member of the East Midlands Region of U3As. The purpose of the Network is to further the work of the Third Age Trust and the U3A as defined by The Vision and Mission Statement of the Third Age Trust and the Principles of the U3A Movement – appendix 1 of this document (The Third Age Trust is the national representative body for U3As in the UK.)

In the past the Region has tended to direct and organise events within the Network. However, the continuing expansion and growth of the U3A movement means that it is becoming increasingly impractical for the Region to continue to completely fulfil all of these activities.

The Region has decided that it is more cost effective in terms of both time and money to organise events through Networks, reserving significant topics for truly Regional workshops (an example would be the Constitution and Committees workshop run in October 2014). It should also have the benefit of achieving more grass roots input. 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 document sets out to put this understanding in place for the Leicestershire and Rutland Network of U3As and is done on the basis that the organisation has decided to operate without an executive or a constitution. The only formal positions in the Network are a Co-ordinator and a Treasurer. The Network holds meetings on a regular basis throughout the year (at present three times) to which all member U3As are invited to send delegates. Each U3A is requested to appoint a Network Representative who will attend all meetings over a defined period in order to aid continuity of debate and action. The work of the Network is funded by donations from its U3As.

# Leicestershire and Rutland Organisation Structure

## The Role of the Network

In the Three year Plan launched by the Third Age Trust at the 2014 Conference and AGM, **Going Forward 2014-2017**, the role of the Networks is clearly identified:

“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 the 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 Development team

The Development Team is a small team selected from suitable volunteers from Network U3As. Ideally all team members will be trained to Regional Volunteer standard.

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 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:

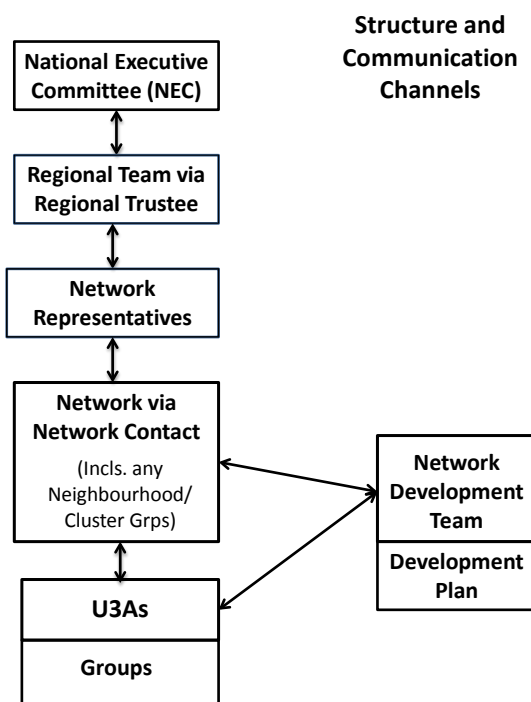
- Encourage ongoing Network activities
- Provide ideas/resources/information for the Network
- Offer support and encouragement to Network U3As
- Answer questions from U3As
- Give continuity and cohesion to the Network
- Start new U3As
- Produce a Development plan to include information from the Network and from Regional and National committees

## Relationship with the Region, the Regional Trustee and the 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 network.

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 throughout the U3As.

## Development Strategies

For the new organisational responsibilities to become successful it is necessary to describe the underlying operational details that will be used by the Network and its Development Team.

### Education, Development and Support for Existing U3As

The key to providing support and development for existing U3As has been identified in the 2014 report “Going Forward” as an ongoing dialogue between U3As at Network meetings. This will include all channels of communication from U3As up to the Third Age Trust and from the Third Age Trust down to individual U3As. For reasons of sheer scale, the Network meeting is seen as the prime means of information sharing.

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, Keep Your U3A Vibrant, Growth). Grants are available from the Third Age Trust for workshops attended by U3As from at least 5 U3As.
- Providing communication forums for peer groups: from anecdotal evidence it appears that committee members and interest group leaders would welcome the opportunity to discuss with their peers and share ideas, experience and materials. Whilst these meetings are seen as informal and the province of U3As in the Network, it will be of benefit if some structure is incorporated so that extra benefit is derived from the initiative.
- In Depth study groups: often undertaken by single U3As where a member has proposed a topic for study, sharing the outcomes of such projects could increase the number of projects undertaken and encourage U3As to work together on them.
- A Shared Learning project (SLP) involves a team of U3A members, usually from a number of U3As, exploring a specific topic, proposed by a U3A or by an institution (such as a museum, art gallery, stately home or library) and normally there is a set time span. The Network and its U3As should encourage their members to think about SLPs as part of the Development programme. The Regional SLP Co-Coordinator will be available to assist in organising such activity.
- Study Days can be run by a single U3A, by a group or indeed a Network. Unlike workshops which can attract a Workshop grant (see Workshops above) 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 older people.
- To encourage the establishment of U3As in every part of the country where conditions are suitable and to support and collaborate with them.

This means all U3As should ensure that they publicize the movement and be prepared, to assist in every way possible with membership growth and possible 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:
  - does the catchment area have a sufficient number of potential U3A members?
  - are there U3A county or regional boundary issues that need to be communicated and resolved?
- Local sensibilities:
  - is there a sense of community?
  - are there specific local factors to take into account?
  - is there a history of U3A activity in the area?
- Resources:
  - are there suitable meeting rooms?
  - transport links?

To achieve a successful start-up of a new U3A the Development Team will follow the planning guidelines drawn up by National Office and work closely with the Regional 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 the Network. The Network will review the plan and project progress at their regular meetings.

## Vision & Mission Statement

### **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