

Report on U3A Conference and AGM 2018

East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham
28 – 30 August

We certainly did learn, laugh and live during the recent U3A Conference. The three of days of meetings, workshops and lectures together with networking and socialising left us with renewed enthusiasm for our organisation.

In this report we intend to detail the topics covered at conference that we found interesting and from which we learnt the most.

Registration took place at 14.00 followed by the welcome address and Regional Meeting chaired by Jeff Carter who shared with us all the issues relating better use of volunteers to support local U3A group etc. Concern was voiced about the new advice on Safeguarding which we felt could leave members vulnerable. JC suggested we write to him with our concerns.

We attended the workshop run by Chief Executive, Sam Mauger, who presented the **Learning Not Lonely** impact report published in 2018.

The Third Age Trust (TAT) research aimed to evaluate the benefit of the model of lifelong learning offered by the U3A in the following ways:

- TAT undertook a literature review to identify the impact of lifelong learning
- A questionnaire on the findings of the review was completed by 801 participants
- The results were analysed by eight focus groups of U3A members

Findings

Literature

- the main body of research has focused on formal adult learning rather than peer-to-peer informal learning

Academic research

- showed that engaging in learning activities has positive outcomes

Questionnaire – demonstrated the value of the U3A to wellbeing

- It made life worth living
- Prevented loneliness
- Established a connection to local community
- Delivered health benefits
- Improved confidence

We explored ways we can send out the message of the report and put the U3A on the agenda as an *alternative view of ageing*.

Ideas/comments

- NHS prescription - join the U3A!
- Patrons and 'champions' needed e.g. Esther Rantzen, Joan Bakewell
- Members to spread the word
- What would it be like if the U3A disappeared?
- U3A publicity is being updated

Contact:

- Citizens Advice
- Local MPs have been sent a copy
- Local Councils
- GP patient participation group
- Poster in GP surgeries

CD asked if consideration could be given within the grants application for money for more local publicity.

JP attended the workshop about **Communications** which was led by Liz Drury, the U3A National Communications Officer, and which is summarised below.

- The dictionary definition of communication is 'the imparting or exchanging of information by, speaking, writing or using some other medium'
- There are different forms and platforms from which communication channels can be built
- Website being central
- Others include – email, newsletter, media, social media, micro websites (eg.blogs) and paper magazine (TAM)

During the session we explored

- Becoming a U3A journalist
- Writing for different platforms and practising writing for social media which can raise the profile of the U3A
- Emphasis was on telling a good story that people can relate to
- The elements of a good story are: human, new, surprising, unusual, interesting, local
- Journalistic rules important when writing: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
- Local radio – find out what the interview is about – is it just to promote U3A or is it part of a bigger idea (eg. retirement)? recorded live? at studio or on phone? – a pithy sound bite required - ask for a CD recording of the interview

This was an enjoyable workshop as it was clearly presented, the activities and follow up were well considered and the topics included were relevant to proceedings within our local U3A and committee.

Sal Cooke, technology expert, presented the workshop **Putting Learning Centre Stage** which we both attended. Whilst her talk was informative, entertaining and interactive as we used tablets, phones etc to connect to the internet, she had so

much to pass on to us that it was difficult to concentrate for 1.5 hours! She was basically asking us what we do to get our message across and bringing us up to date on the best use of recent digital innovations. Here are some of the details:

- Discussion on the difficulties of accessing resources on the national U3A website
- There are many excellent resources but difficult to navigate website to access them
- The Trust needs a webmaster but it will be costly
- U3A's should embrace up to date digital requirements as many future new members will be used to using these materials and will expect us to be doing the same
- You can run a poll within your U3A using PollEv.com
- YouTube is the most used search engine
- U3A has a YouTube channel
- Mindmaster website – use to build mind maps
- MOOC – massive online course
- edEX – popular MOOC – courses permanently available
- Set up Interest Group - choose course from MOOC, study at home, come together regularly to discuss
- Each U3A should have a member who researches online sources
- Handbook for Group Leaders on national website
- Recommends website - Justin - music tutor for guitar
- Digital links to Social Science – free on line.

This session certainly contained much information. Using MOOCs for short term interest groups is something we could consider in our U3A. We agreed that the national website needs updating and that the resources need to be made more accessible

CD attended **U3A Plus** the aim of which is to provide advice and support to all U3As to enable them to achieve full inclusivity for all their members.

More than 40% of over 50s have a hearing loss increasing to 71% in the over 70s. By 65 one in three has reduced vision.

We discussed the support we are already providing; hearing loops, ensuring premises are wheelchair friendly, asking the speaker to use a microphone etc. It was felt that, although U3A is a member led organisation, we are still viewed as a service provider in terms of being required to make reasonable adaptations so members can be included.

However one message we should remember is that we are an education charity and not a welfare one. Examples were given of instances when it was clear that we had to refuse to include members e.g. a member suffering from dementia and who is disruptive to the group and who does not have a carer. This basically means that the overall need of the group should be paramount. These situations needed to be handled sensitively and members signposted to an agency which could provide support.

Enquiring Minds attended by CD looked at Shared Learning Projects. Many successful shared Learning Projects were presented, including Blackwater U3A's project.

We were provided with the Getting Involved in Research details and information as to how to get started. We then broke into 4 groups to consider which topics we might consider undertaking. These suggestions included:

- Research into the people whose portraits appear in Gainsborough's painting at the Gainsborough Museum.
- Putting together a list of music which had meant a lot to us examining the life and times and context in which the music had been written.
- The history of pubs in a particular area.
- The history of our High Street and what has happened to the shops etc.

The final lecture we attended was brilliant! Professor Janice Thompson from the University of Birmingham, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Science spoke on **Moving + Eating Well = Ageing Well**. Her presentation notes can be read in Appendix 1. In conjunction with this lecture we were given **The UK Diabetes and Diet Questionnaire** (Appendix 2), which perhaps we could make available to our members as this issue is currently topical. Professor Thompson stated that older people have a higher risk of diabetes due to reduced functioning of the pancreas and being overweight and inactive.

The basic messages were:-

- 'Walk more, sit less, and exercise.
- Doing any amount of physical activity is better than doing nothing.
- Try to frequently break up your sitting/sedentary time with moving.
- Engaging in diverse types of activities is highly beneficial.
- The importance of taking vitamin D.
- Try to obtain the excellent interactive Eatwell Guide from the NHS website www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx.

Overseeing the conference and AGM was the U3A Chairman, Pam Jones, who was standing down after three years leadership. A remarkable 80 year old woman, who during her chairmanship had travelled extensively in the UK and also visited Japan. Her time in the chair had meant hard work for everyone due to the governance and GDPR issues, however, there should be less red tape in future. She detailed some of the highlights of her chairmanship and ideas for the future of the organisation. .

- Membership of the U3A rising by 20,000 per annum
- International interest – USA, China and Hungary
- Learning Not Lonely report published
- BEACON is successful but the workload has become too much for volunteers
- TAM and Sources to be refreshed

- U3A Plus – access to U3A for everyone regardless of impairment or disability
- Resource hub will be expanding but costly
- “University” – don’t dwell on name rather be positive - U3A changes lives – legal name change for charity would be costly
- Encourage all members to sign up for the national newsletter
- Finance – risk strategy – there is a long term strategic plan

Pam Jones mentioned that the U3A is not a top down organisation. The central office is there only to advise and support. Most of the ‘staff’ at the conference were volunteers from local U3As.

As committee members we know that, whilst our committee oversees events in our U3A, we are reliant on the wonderful volunteers who run our interest groups and are at the heart of what we do. Following on from this, new members are our life blood. We should take more time to nurture them and also ask them what they can do for the U3A, as well as informing them what we can do for them.

Our thanks go to Limebrook Maldon U3A and Blackwater U3A for the opportunity to attend this conference.

Jess Patient, Speaker Secretary, Limebrook Maldon U3A

Chris Dove, Chair, Limebrook Maldon U3A