

Background and Summary

While there were some lingering pandemic effects, this year was a return to a near normal year. However some positives from the lockdown period are here to stay, for example the use of online Zoom software, hence avoiding commuting time and venue hire costs.

Membership of the LRU3A network remained at 43 u3as. Although only about half of these are active in the network (attending Delegates meetings, etc). The u3as that had seen a fall in membership over the pandemic period reported recovery in their numbers. Others managed to hold membership steady, but none reported growth. Membership figures overall for London Region over the last few years are:

- March 2019 25,823
- March 2020 25,888
- March 2021 20,973
- March 2022 21,032
- March 2023.....21,875

Nationally, while numbers dropped over the pandemic period, membership is again growing now up to 375,000 (at March 2023).

The main 'success' for LRU3A is to now have a new Regional Trustee, Stella Morris. After a gap of a year since John Bent stepped down from this role, having fulfilled his term, we are pleased to have a representative on the Trust's Board. John has now taken on the role of LRU3A Treasurer (with Jim Jenkins stepping down).

LRU3A main initiatives and activities this year have been: Delegates meetings, Peer Support Groups (including a Chairs Forum meeting), supporting u3a Week (by a 'Table Tennis Turnout'), Online Talks Programme, Summer School and general communications of other events happening across the region or nationally.

LRU3a supported the national 'u3a Week' initiative by holding a 'Table Tennis Turnout'. This was supported by 7 u3as and 26 members attended.

Like many individual u3as, the LRU3A Executive Committee has not been successful in recruiting members to fill gaps and find successors for departing committee members. This has led to a limitation of the initiatives we have been able to support or promote. However we hope that you have felt that our regional network activities have been of use and have supported you in your activities. The following are some of this year's main activities and achievements.

Objectives of the London Region of U3As (LRU3A)

Our objectives remain to support London u3a committees and educational/social activities for all our members. As a regional network, our support extends to all London u3as, and together with our Regional Trustee as ex-officio member of the Executive Committee, we uphold and benefit from the work of the Third Age Trust in London and provide a voice for London u3as at regional and national levels.

Delegate Meetings

The Executive Committee have always been keen to respond to and facilitate the interests and wishes of all u3as in our network – we are not a 'top-down' organisation. The Delegate meetings provide a quarterly opportunity for representatives to get together, discuss issues, exchange ideas and provide mutual support (a problem discussed is a problem halved).

Delegate meetings this year have included sessions on:

- Reports, News & guest speakers on 'Influencing & Campaigning', 'Contingency Planning', 'Environmental Policy' & the Future of the Third Age Trust
- Reports from Trustees & Peer Support Groups, News from the Trust, and News from London u3as

Last year's average representation at these meetings was 62% and this year it was averaged about 50%. Disappointing. Trend might be due to Zoom fatigue and a return of physical activities. We had hoped that in 2023/24 we would return to more face-to-face meetings but the attraction of Zoom and avoiding a commute across London is probably here to stay. We had planned to make the AGM physical but low registration vs cost of hiring a venue has meant we reverted to an online AGM again.

Treasurers Report (John Bent):

The results for the year to 31st August 2023 show a surplus of £2,198 (against last year's deficit of £97). This has improved our cash reserves to £10,672, from £8,474 at the end of last year.

The bookings for our Summer School were above target (325 target days sold vs 315 budgeted). While anticipating about 10% inflation, we nevertheless kept the ticket price to £41 (just £2 up on last year). However, by putting down early deposits for venue hire and catering, we were able to hold costs down and made a healthy surplus of £2,756 on the event.

The Summer School is our main source of revenue to fund anything else we provide in the year. Conducting meetings (e.g. for Delegates and Peer Groups) online rather than in person has helped to keep our annual costs down by avoiding the need for venue hire. However, we did incur costs for the in-person Chairs' Forum, but these were partly offset by a £500 grant for the event from the Third Age Trust. The meeting itself was well attended with interesting presentations and lively discussion from participants.

Mailchimp (providers of the software we use for all our LRU3A bulk mailings) have changed their terms so that to ensure we keep within the free account level, we have to restrict our quantity of messages sent. Any further change by them may necessitate having to start paying for the software which would impact on our finances.

A Copy of the Annual Accounts is available on the London Region of u3as [website](#).

Peer Support Group Networks (PSGs) (Liz Day)

The PSGs are role-based mutual support networks for u3a committee members and other post-holders, but they are also encouraged to share their knowledge more widely via the LRU3A website and Delegate meetings. The LRU3A has encouraged the establishment of PSGs, and representatives of the Executive Committee attend meetings to provide support if required. A common issue has been the lack of peer volunteers prepared to help with coordinating meetings, planning agendas, and facilitating activities.

Treasurers: This PSG had been dormant last year due to the lack of a Coordinator but has been successfully resurrected this year. Topics covered have included: 'Checking tax status and public liability insurance,' 'Handling payments and income from outings', 'Level of reserves required',

'Development of a Sample Excel accounts template', 'Beacon & Paypal default', 'SPG on Banking', 'Gift Aid update', 'National End of Year report review', 'Items for Finance Nes Extra' and general open discussions.

IT/Webmasters: Has continued to meet online regularly and has looked at a range of subjects including: 'SiteWorks (Sitebuilder replacement)'- several times, 'Digital Strategy, Commission 5, Support to u3as', SPG – Alias email accounts, Website Analytics and Open discussion.

The Groups Coordinators: Unfortunately this PSG has folded or is temporarily suspended. This is due to lack of Coordinator contributions to the steering group. If you want to help resurrect this PSG please get in touch with Liz.

Public Relations: This PSG has also been suspended following the re-location of our PR Adviser Rodney Fox. Rodney will be a hard act to follow with his general enthusiasm and regular PR Mailings, but if anyone wants to help resurrect this PSG please get in touch with Liz

Chairs: While not a regularly meeting PSG as the above, this year we organised another 'Chairs' Forum on 6th February. This again was much appreciated and well supported by 37 members attending (representing 31 of the 43 u3as in London). It was a chance for many to meet face to face for the first time (including some of the LRU3A Executive Committee). The agenda included:

- Experiences of being a u3a Chair
- Ways of chairing including useful skills and experience.
- u3a's benefit to the community
- Nurturing and investing in new members
- Developing new Models of Learning (e.g. Taster courses, Bite size, use of streamed materials)
- Successful workshops and interest groups and future events and community links.
- Contributing to the community on Environmental Sustainability and working with local partners to influence local and national issues.

Communications (Vivek Nanda)

Video Conferencing: Our Zoom Pro account with a Larger Meeting add-on (500-attendee capacity) has again been used for most LRU3A Executive and Delegate meetings, and the Online Talks Programme (see Education/Social Events), as well as by the Peer Group Networks. We are grateful for the subsidy from our Regional Trust's funds to support this initiative which has enabled large numbers of u3a members to participate in regional activities. We have continued using Zoom to host the weekly drop-in sessions of a national initiative called 'Lets Talk Tech'

(<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81993153499?pwd=OHM5eTlCS2YxaUdyRlZMcjFLU2tKQT09> Meeting ID: 819 9315 3499 Passcode: 754565), as well as supporting the associated website (<https://u3asites.org.uk/code/u3asite.php?site=1144&page=0>), closed Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1002726203847774/>) and private YouTube channel with highlights from the meetings that would be of interest to a wider audience (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsB2t41TNozEgawoDwo3r2Ntj2dXIEmFR>).

Bulk Messaging: In the first quarter of 2023, Mailchimp announced major changes to their free plan that is used by London Region, with the number of contacts being reduced by 75% to 500 and the number of emails being reduced by 90% to 1000 per month. In response to this, London Region has tried to combine multiple emails into one wherever possible. This has allowed us to continue using the Mailchimp free plan. However, the continued tightening of security measures by Mailchimp is

continuing the process of making the free accounts less accessible as well. The London Region Comms Team is continuing the search for alternative email systems, as Beacon is not suitable for the requirements of the London Region Talks Programme and the Summer School. Please email Vivek on communications.lru3a@gmail.com if you are using another email platform, apart from Mailchimp or Beacon.

The process of updating key contact details continues. Please inform mailchimpadvisor.lru3a@gmail.com of any changes to the contact details for the members of your Committee throughout your year (not just after your AGM).

Educational / Social Events (Catherine Ware)

Online events: Because there were so many online talks available after the pandemic from different sources, the Events team noticed that attendances were beginning to drop and decided to reduce the Online Talks Programme to 6 monthly talks between October 2022-March 2023. Some members expressed disappointment as they were unable/reluctant to meet in person. The LRU3A online talks remain popular, attracting a total of 1234 attendees in the 6 months (average of 206 per talk). There were just 14% no-shows.

Summer School 25th-26th July 2023. This was the 10th Anniversary of the Summer School (2013-2023). An alternative venue was considered (LIFT on White Lion Street, Islington) but the majority of the Events Team felt it needed testing first on smaller events such as Study Days, workshops, meetings (e.g. Chairs' Forum). We therefore fell back on the familiar St. Bride Institute off Fleet Street.

The Programme comprised 17 talks, 4 workshops and 8 guided walks. Instead of a common theme to the programme, contributors were asked to select a topic of their choice from the usual wide range of subject areas. 52% of the contributors were u3a members.

Altogether there were 270 applicants of whom 50% had not attended a London summer school before. 76% of applicants were from 34 London u3as, while 24% of applicants came from 47 u3as outside London (mainly home counties but also from as far away as Northumbria, Wales, Norfolk, Devon). We catered for about 175 meals per day. We served pre-packed lunches again (more hygienic and a faster service), but took into account feedback requesting a healthier menu of salads and fresh fruit, along with some celebratory chocolates. For ticket sales and financial results see Treasurer's report. We received 180 feedback forms over the 2 days, with the 82% of sessions were rated as good or excellent. The main problem was poor sound in the main hall. However, it was clear that most people had enjoyed the event, with 72% of respondents saying that they intend to come again next year.

To mark our 10th Anniversary, a digital booklet was compiled by Jo Livingston, Subject Advisor on Living History. *History of the London Region Summer School 2013-2023* can be viewed on the Events or Welcome pages of the London Region website: <https://u3asites.org.uk/files/l/london-region/docs/londonregionsummerschoolhistory10thanniversary2023.09.27.pdf>

Research and Shared Learning Projects (SLPs) (Jo Walters)

Transport for London Corporate Archives: Revealing the Past. What has been achieved so far: During 2023, 40 volunteers transcribed, quality checked and indexed the minute books of the Underground Electric Railway Company of London (UREL) 1902-1933

Over 2500 volunteer hours were invested to make 582 individual sets of minutes available to researchers online for the first time.

The Transport for London Archives have recently secured external funding for the digitisation of the Minute books of the London General Omnibus Company (GLOC) from 1829 – 2029, so the challenge for 2024 and beyond, is to make all these transcriptions freely available online.

High Street project: iBase is available for u3a to use for 10 years. Individuals from u3as across the country continue to populate and enhance the information available on this site.

National Events

We have continued to draw on the individual presentations, workshops and tutorials developed and delivered nationally to support u3a committees and post holders, and freely available from the u3a office. Topics have included:

- 'Beacon for Networks'
- 'Use of Social Media'
- 'Diversity, Equality and Inclusion'
- 'Finance Matters'

Succession Planning

LRU3A has had another positive year, and we would like to thank all of our colleagues for their contributions to the Executive Committee, Peer Support Groups and Summer School Sub-committee. Many thanks also to all the u3a representatives who have attended meetings and workshops and contributed to the lively discussions.

How we all contribute will determine our continuing sustainability. We have struggled to keep some activities going due to the lack of volunteers. We need more volunteers to help with a variety of tasks to support our constitutional obligations, aims and objectives – ultimately, to fully support London u3as and we need a second Vice Chair to represent South London. If you have some spare time, please join us!

We would like to end with a thank you to those stepping down this year for their service to LRU3A – Jenny Wilson who has come to the end of her term as a Vice Chair. Jenny's enthusiasm and energy has helped keep LRU3A functioning.

With best wishes for the coming year,
Jenny Wilson, Vice Chair (South of Thames) and
Derek Harwood, Vice Chair (North of Thames)
October 2023