

GETTING INVOLVED IN RESEARCH



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE



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This Guide has been developed and edited
by the National Research Sub-committee October 2016
Gwen Dawe, Jenny Carley (NEC members)
Ann Salvage, Catherine Ware, Jo Livingston, Jennifer Anning

Section 1. Welcome to U3A Research

1.1. Who is this booklet for?

This booklet has been written for U3A members who may be interested in getting involved in research, including those who feel they have no research experience. It can also be used as a resource by U3A Research Ambassadors and Shared Learning Project Co-ordinators to provide training and guidance.

1.2. What is research?

At its simplest, research is the systematic collection and analysis of information for the advancement of knowledge. If you look into the history of a local hospital, investigate birds visiting your garden, compare costs and benefits of insurance policies or ask people about their views on something, you are conducting research.



1.3. Aims of this booklet

Many U3A members are already involved in different types of research. However it is likely that many more feel that they don't know enough about it to get involved and would appreciate some guidelines on developing and conducting research and disseminating the results.

This booklet aims:

- To encourage U3A members (including those who feel they have no research experience) to get involved in research
 - To demystify research and make it readily accessible
 - To demonstrate types of research carried out by U3A members
 - To provide basic guidelines on developing or getting involved in a research project (Specialist guides may be produced at a later date on specific types of research)

1.4 Who can get involved in U3A research?

If you thought you didn't have the necessary experience, skills and qualities to get involved in U3A research, you may need to think again! Whether or not you have experience of formal research, you almost certainly have at least some of the skills that are useful in research through your work, volunteering or hobbies (e.g. ability to communicate clearly with others, to work independently or as a team). The U3A encourages members to share their knowledge and skills with others for mutual benefit. Where necessary, training can be provided.

The most important quality for a researcher is *curiosity* — a desire to find out more about something — and that initial spark, shared with other U3A members, could lead you to discoveries no one else has had the time or interest to make.

Section 2. The Importance of Research

2.1 A U3A learning objective

Research is an important part of learning and a core part of U3A's remit. The founders of U3A saw it as a core activity of members working to increase knowledge in many areas and a founding principle was that:

"Strong emphasis will be laid on research in all the university's activities. Every member will be encouraged to join in the widespread accumulation of scattered data required for advancement of knowledge of certain kinds".¹

More recently, the Third Age Trust's three-year plan *Going Forward* identified research as a fundamental U3A activity.²

Research can stimulate creativity and test our understanding in ways that differ from passive learning. It can help U3A members to gain knowledge and skills and often breaks new ground. Many projects offer U3As a chance to contribute to their local communities. So, apart from anything else, research can be very satisfying and great fun!



1950s Holidays in Bognor Regis: A Shared Learning Project undertaken by Bognor Regis U3A with Bognor Regis Record Office 2014.

2.2 Research can assist U3A planning and management

U3As use market research to provide insights into the communities in which they are located in order to recruit new members and develop useful working relationships with relevant organisations. Membership research helps U3As to improve planning and management of their resources and activities by understanding the needs and preferences of their members.

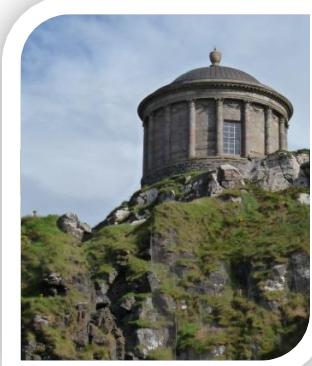
2.3 U3A involvement in research by other organisations

Universities and other organisations that undertake research can benefit greatly from the assistance of U3A members. With a wealth of experience and skills, members have much to offer when there is a shortage of funding for research. Some organisations have a lot of material they do not have the time and resources to work on, and voluntary assistance offered by U3A members can be invaluable to them.

Research funders increasingly require community involvement as a condition of making a grant. So organisations seeking funding are reaching out to the community and seeking collaboration. In the case of age-related research, both funders and researchers are coming to recognise the importance of involving older people in research — not just as research subjects but as active participants in designing and undertaking research and in influencing the policy decisions that result from it.³

Bishop Hervey Trail (Causeway U3A and U3A Foyle, 2014)

This Shared Learning Project related to Frederick Hervey, Bishop of Derry and 4th Earl of Bristol. He was a notable philanthropist who made a considerable impact on Ireland, especially in the Derry area, in the 18th century. The research group developed a Trail of places associated with the Earl Bishop, produced a map of the Trail and published an accompanying booklet, which are available in local tourist offices. The project involved three partner organisations: The National Trust, Northern Regional College and St.Columb's Cathedral, Derry.



Mussenden Temple



Portrait of the Earl Bishop
courtesy of the
National Trust



Manannan Mac Lir statue



Section 3. Recent developments in U3A research

3.1 U3A National Research Sub-committee

The National U3A three-year development plan *Going Forward*⁴ called for the reinstatement of the National Research Sub-committee to encourage all types of research. Details of the sub-committee's terms of reference, contacts and information about key activities are available on the Third Age Trust website. <http://www.u3a.org.uk>

3.2 Research Ambassadors

One of the terms of reference of the National Research Sub-committee is to encourage participation in research through the recruitment of Research Ambassadors in all regions.⁵ Research Ambassadors encourage and support research throughout U3A, at both local and national levels, and where appropriate develop working relationships with universities and other bodies.



3.3 National Research Database www.u3aresearch.org.uk

Another important development has been the formation of the U3A National Research Database which showcases past and current research undertaken by U3A members. Prior to the development of the database, the plethora of research involving U3A was scattered and difficult to locate and access.

The database contains an ever-increasing amount of information about U3A-led research projects, including Shared Learning Projects. It is accessible to all U3A members and makes it much easier to identify what research has already been undertaken, what is ongoing, and how to obtain information about it. The database (excluding personal details) is also accessible to the general public as a 'shop window' to advertise the achievements and capabilities of U3A.

The Research Database

<http://www.u3aresearch.org.uk>

Project ID	170
Description	Guide to BFI Mediatheque films about East End of London
Topic	Arts
Type	U3A-led research (SLP)
U3A	Members of London U3As
Organization/partner	British Film Institute, South Bank, London
Year started	2010
Source of reference	Sources 40, Jun 10
Output	Report available online at www.bfi.org.uk/ 36page report available from Resource Centre
Document	None
Notes	None

You can search for projects by Region, U3A, Topic, Type of Project, Partner organisation, Keyword and more.

Each project record also gives a brief description, date, outputs and contacts where known. The Database also has a help facility and a forum.

U3A Research Database

| home | browse | all projects | edit | contact | help | forum | log in | [search](#)

Browse projects

Browse for projects by topic or region below or search the whole database by keyword using the box at the top of the page, do a [filtered search by type of project](#) or search for projects with third party organisations by [organisation name](#).

Topics	Regions
Ageing	East Midlands
Archaeology	East of England
Arts	International
History	London
Learning	National (UK)
Medical and Health	North East
Memory	North West
Natural world	Northern Ireland
Research	Scotland
Science	South East
Social history	South West
Sociology	Wales
Talks	West Midlands
Technology	Yorkshire and Humber
Transport	
U3A	
Walks	

U3A Research Database

| home | browse | all projects | edit | contact | help | forum | log in | [search](#)

Projects registered under the topic Arts

Measuring the benefits of participation in U3A art and creative groups

Part of 'Museum of My Life' project based on six Northumbrian museums

Follies, grottos & crinklecrankle walls in Norfolk and Suffolk by U3A Architectural Group

History and memories of Electric Palace cinema at Harwich

Nationwide survey of children's literature, using U3A members

Investigation of BFI films featuring older women, involving Wembley Film Group from Brent U3A. U3A members nationwide involved via questionnaire

Preparing guide to BFI Mediatheque film archive

[Guide to BFI Mediatheque films about East End of London](#)

Children's literature over last 100 years

Children's literature over last 100 years - 2nd project

Researching detective fiction

Gallery accessibility for older and disabled visitors at Dulwich

Researching Visitor Book 1867-8 at Dulwich. This was a pilot project of one volume to assess whether scanning all 49 volumes would be practical or worthwhile.

U3A members making music together as a creative ensemble & working on collaborative composition

Researching Jewish successes in Olympic Games

U3A Research Database

| home | browse | all projects | edit | contact | help | forum | log in | [search](#)

You searched for 'BFI' and the following results were found

Investigation of BFI films featuring older women, involving Wembley Film Group from Brent U3A. U3A members nationwide involved via questionnaire

Preparing guide to BFI Mediatheque film archive

[Guide to BFI Mediatheque films about East End of London](#)

U3A Research Database Search

To search for registered projects, select type of project (or leave as "all types") and use keywords in the box.

- All types
- U3A-led research (SLP)
- U3A-led research (not an SLP)
- External research (U3A as research assistants)
- External research (U3A as research subjects)
- External research about U3A

Section 4. A Colourful Tapestry: examples of U3A research

A glance at the U3A National Research Database (see 3.3) will reveal the very rich variety of research in which U3A members get involved. Broadly speaking, these research projects fall into five categories and this section outlines the characteristics of each of these types and gives examples of some of the work that has already been done within that category.

4.1 U3A Shared Learning Projects (SLPs)

Shared Learning Projects are the most common form of U3A research. They began in autumn 2002 at the British Museum in London, with a project involving 12 members from North London U3A researching an object of their choice. The central feature of an SLP is that it involves members of U3As working together with other U3As and/or with an outside organisation or institution on a project which is planned as a joint venture. The learning will be 'shared' between all the parties involved and the research will have a useful outcome.

The SLP model is very flexible and can take many forms, but SLPs always have a specific, realistic and achievable goal and are led by a U3A team leader, in partnership with a member of staff from the institution if one is involved. Projects usually last around 12 weeks but they can be much longer and outputs can include reports, booklets, DVDs and contributions to a website. They often conclude with a presentation or exhibition.

A wide variety of outside organisations can become involved in SLPs. These projects can represent an important link between U3As and universities, museums, libraries, stately homes and local communities. These are just some of the institutions that may be interested in working with U3A members on research. Some examples of what a project may involve include working on archival material, researching objects for a museum or university, working with a school or residential home to compile a reminiscence resource pack, or contributing to a community website.

SLPs can also be set up by at least two U3As working together but not involving an outside organisation. Topics might include researching the history of a building or a war memorial, exploring a river or local area, producing a booklet of themed walks... the possibilities are endless! Embarking on an SLP can be an exciting venture and U3A members find the stimulation of new friends, new ideas and new experiences challenging and rewarding. Some people are getting involved in research for the first time.



Heswall U3A and Williamson Art Gallery SLP became a public exhibition 'To Have and To Hold'. Wedding dresses through the 20th Century with accompanying family histories.

Celebrating the South Downs (Sussex U3A Network, 2014)

This Shared Learning Project was developed by the Sussex U3A Network (SUN) in partnership with the South Downs National Park. The Sussex Network wanted to set up a project that would encourage its U3As to work together around a common theme and chose the newly established South Downs National Park as its focus. Twenty three U3As took part in the project and the South Downs National Park provided financial support, practical advice and meeting space.

A number of different projects were undertaken by different U3As, all with the South Downs National Park as a focus. Projects included an investigation of some of the 103 'lost villages' of Sussex, charting the history of the Bonfire Societies, bringing to life people commemorated in a church stained glass window, an exhibition of South Downs paintings, a geological exploration of the South Downs and photography.

Many U3As involved in the project organised public displays of their work at libraries and museums and some continued working on their chosen subjects. The project helped to strengthen groups and increase their motivation. The South Downs National Park benefited from the project as it allowed access to a wider audience. Four seminars were organised in different parts of the area and participating U3As invited National Park speakers to their monthly meetings. As a result of the excellent partnership formed between the U3As and the National Park, further collaboration is under consideration and the National Park now has access to a large pool of researchers and volunteer helpers.⁶



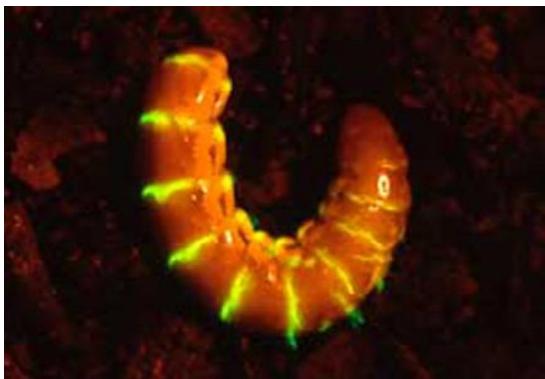
Display by Art Group at the exhibition 'Celebrating the South Downs'

4.2 U3A-led research

As is the case with SLPs, U3A-led research projects are many and widely varied. Broadly speaking, these projects fall into one of three categories:

4.2.1 Interest group research

Local U3A interest groups may choose to investigate something of particular interest to them. A local history group might investigate a local celebrity, a building or an institution; a natural history group might study local flora and fauna; a walking group could map out some interesting local walks and another group might study the history of a local river.



Glow worm survey (Burnham on Crouch U3A, 2015)

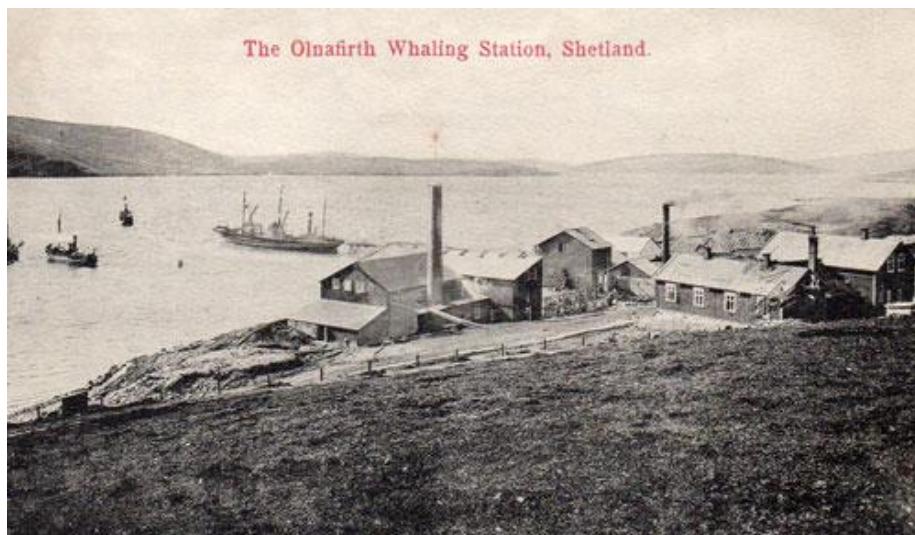
In 2015, members of the bird-watching and wildlife group within Burnham on Crouch U3A helped in the collection of information on glow worms previously collected by a local environmental officer. They undertook a survey of glow worms along a stretch of the sea wall in Burnham on Crouch, visiting the designated area three times in June, July and August

between 10.00 and 11.00 p.m. and counting the glow worms they saw. Results were sent to the UK Environment Agency office in Ipswich, and helped the Agency to make decisions on how to manage areas of woodland, scrub and roadside verges.⁷

Shetland whaling stations (Shetland U3A Sea and Ships Group, 2015)

The group researched the Shetland whaling stations which were in operation from approximately 1904 to 1929. The aim was to collate the information from the many sources held at the archives and online, and produce a history of the stations.

The Olnafirth Whaling Station, Shetland.



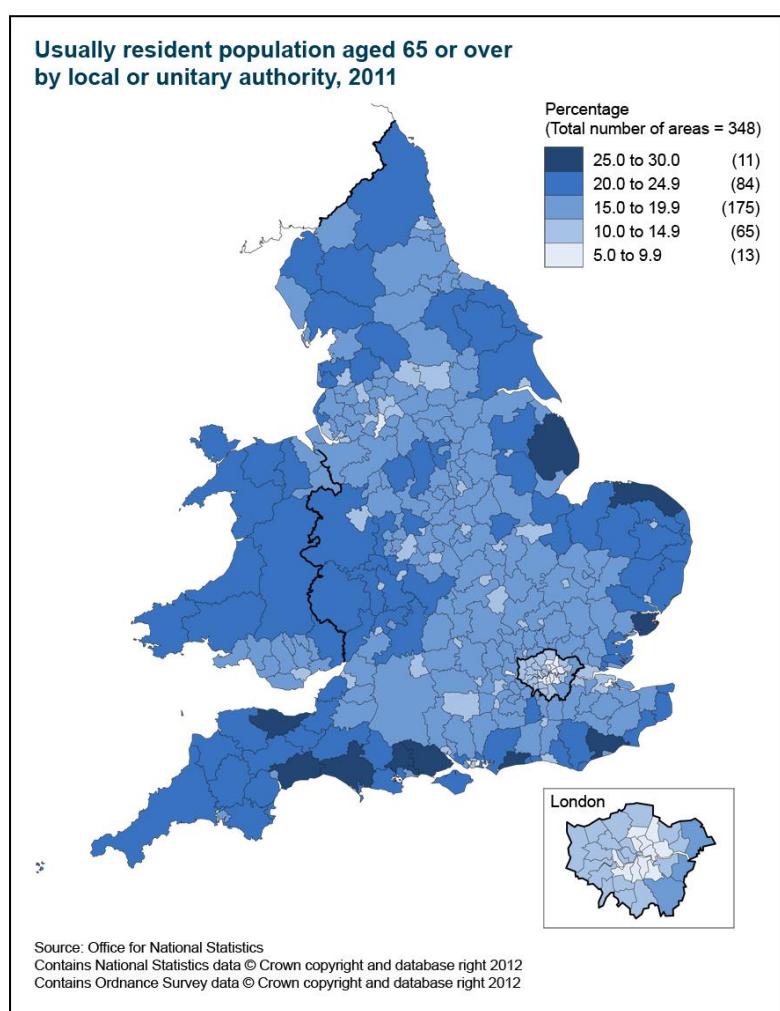
4.2.2 Research on U3A: Market research

Market research can help the U3A at a national or local level to:

- Understand the community it serves and assess market demand for U3A membership
- Plan public awareness and recruitment activities
- Manage expectations and manage growth
- Identify organisations with whom beneficial working relationships can be formed

Areas of research might include:

- Local and national demographic profiles of Third Agers
- Perceptions of U3A by the general public, especially among Third Agers
- Identifying potential barriers to U3A membership
- Identifying the most suitable messages and communication methods
- Identifying potential partner organisations and contacts



Exploring barriers to lifelong learning (Hartlepool and District U3A, 2014)



Newcastle
University

In this collaborative study, members of Hartlepool and District U3A worked with researchers at the Institute of Health and Society at Newcastle University to try to understand why some social groups were under-represented in the U3A's membership. Interviews and focus groups were held with 60 Third Agers with no further education, blue-collar backgrounds and/or living in social housing and the researchers identified a number of barriers to lifelong learning in general and to U3A membership in particular.

Barriers to lifelong learning included poor health, insufficient transport and caring responsibilities. Barriers to joining U3A included lack of knowledge of U3A, the organisation's name, the location of monthly meetings and limited public transport. Lack of confidence in using computers to search for information was a deterrent both to lifelong learning in general and finding out about U3A in particular.

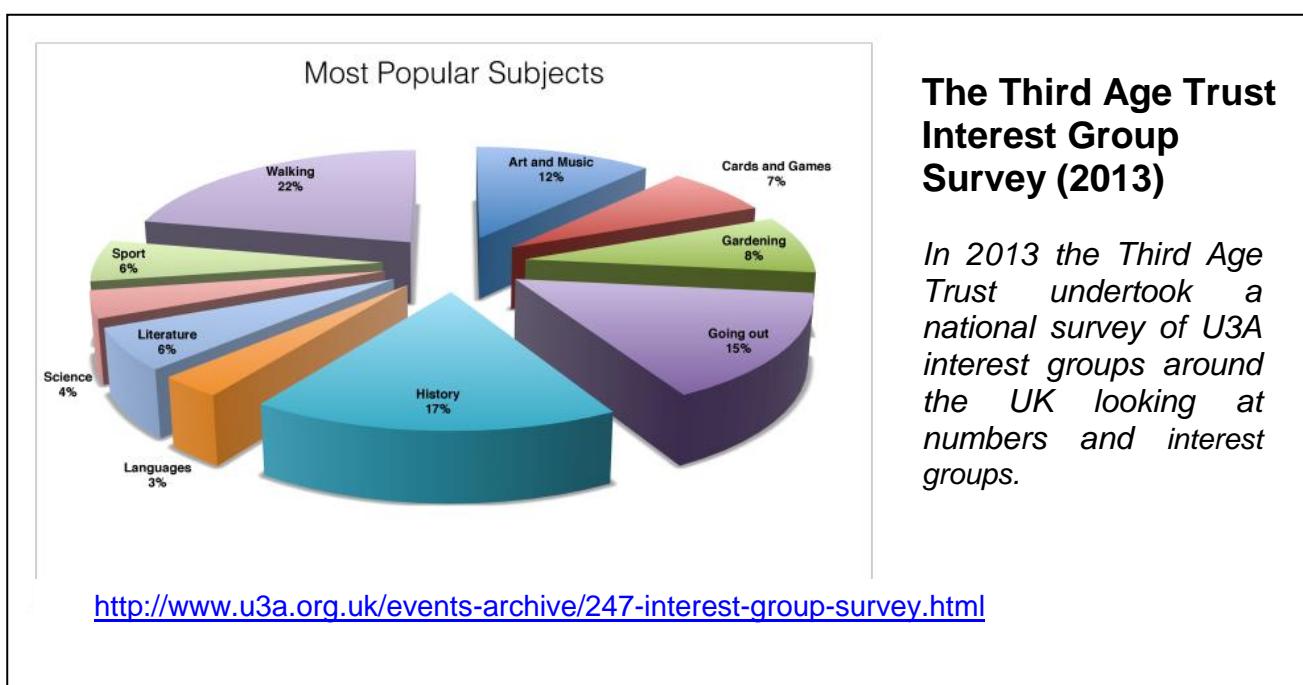
It was found that explaining the ethos and practice of U3A to people who believe themselves "not qualified enough" to take part had considerable potential to overcome the elitism associated with the U3A and the researchers suggest that the low membership cost could be particularly attractive to people on low incomes.

4.2.3 Research on U3A: Planning and Management

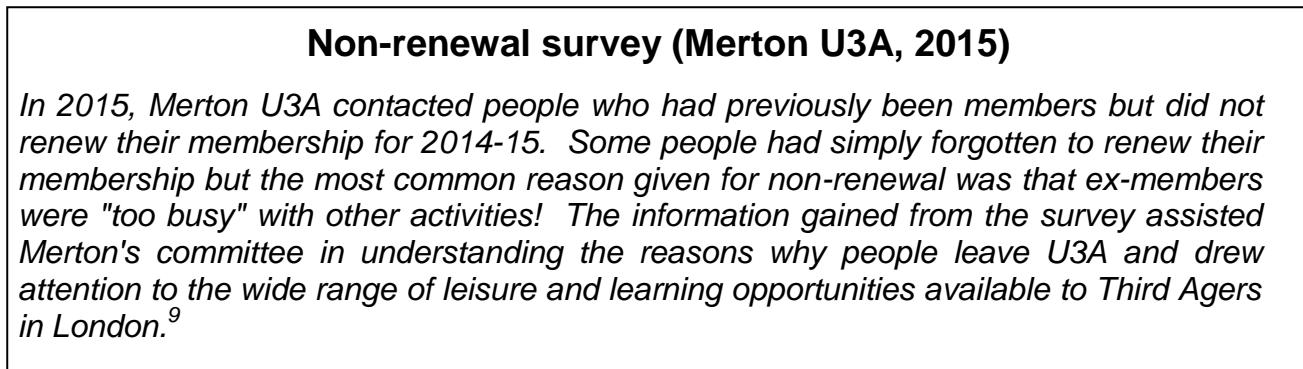
Research can also be helpful to U3As in terms of planning and management.

Research within this category could include:

- **Membership research:** To help local U3As understand their own membership. Topics could include sources of information on U3A (to help target publicity), demographic characteristics, preferences for learning methods, preferences for learning venues, preferred times for participation in activities, preferred communication channels.
- **Research on participation patterns:** To help U3As identify which activities are popular and well-attended and the characteristics of people attending different activities (e.g. age and gender).



- **Non-renewal surveys:** To identify problems such as waiting-lists for groups or the availability of activities offered by other organisations which may lead to people leaving U3A.



4.3 External Research (U3A members as research assistants/collaborators)

U3As across the UK are increasingly working with local universities and other organisations to develop mutually beneficial relationships, and a prime area of collaboration is research. U3A members offer their assistance free of charge to a local university, museum, library, theatre, government body or not-for-profit organisation and both parties derive great benefit from the partnership.

The central feature of research projects in this category is that they involve U3A members taking an active role in research rather than simply acting as research subjects. Members may be involved at many different levels of research, including:

- Helping to plan research
- Collecting information
- Data processing
- Analysing and interpreting the results of research
- Helping to make recommendations based on the results of research
- Helping to disseminate the results of research

The impetus for this type of research may come from an external organisation or U3A.

The value of U3A for members and communities (South Wales and Severnside U3A Network, 2014)¹⁰



In 2014, a partnership was established between South Wales and Severnside U3A network and the University of South Wales to undertake research on the value of U3A for its members and their communities. The research aimed to establish whether keeping their bodies and brains active helps U3A members to place fewer demands on doctors' time and drug budgets. Researchers assessed the value

of U3A to members at difficult times such as on retirement, after bereavement or when encountering health problems. They also looked at whether other agencies for older people were more or less useful to the community than U3A. U3A members were trained in interview techniques, analysis of results and presentation of reports and worked in teams, alongside experienced researchers.

4.4 External research (U3A members as research subjects)

Regional and local U3As may be approached by research departments, individual researchers in universities, other government bodies and not-for-profit organisations. They wish to be put in touch with people who might volunteer to act as subjects in different types of research (usually related to ageing). U3A members may be invited to undergo physical tests (e.g. to measure muscle strength, lung function or brainwaves), to undertake memory tasks, to complete questionnaires or to take part in interviews or focus groups. The organisation concerned usually provides basic information on the aims of the study, criteria for participation, what taking part will involve and what it is hoped to gain from the study.

University projects that are up and running have almost always been scrutinised by the university's ethics committee to ensure that no participants will be harmed and that information given will be confidential and kept in a secure way. Care is taken to screen requests for help before passing them on to local U3As but it is up to individual members to decide whether or not to take part in individual research projects.

The organisations asking U3A to circulate information on research projects recognise that by doing this they can potentially gain access to a ready pool of research subjects within the right age group. It is therefore not surprising that U3A receives a large number of such requests. If you take part in research in this way, there will not necessarily be any personal benefit to you. If you give up your time to participate, you may be offered a small payment and/or travelling expenses and should always be given full information on what is expected of you.

**Language and Thinking
(Department of Language and Communication
University College London, 2015)**



In 2015, researchers at University College London invited U3A members to take part in an investigation of whether difficulties with certain types of words and sentences are related to problems in memory and thinking. People with aphasia (language problems following stroke) would be asked to undertake some speaking, listening and reading tests and to solve various thinking and reasoning puzzles. The study also needed 'healthy' people who had not suffered brain damage to establish normal patterns of performance on these tests and U3A members were invited to join this group.

People taking part were asked to attend the university to undertake tests and a short interview over a period of two months and were offered a small payment for each session (plus travelling expenses if living outside London).¹¹

4.5 External research (about U3A as an organisation)

A final category of research is work undertaken by outside organisations or individuals relating to U3A as an organisation or examining characteristics or activities of U3A members. Such research might be undertaken by organisations focusing on ageing or lifelong learning to examine, for example, U3A's contribution to learning activities in the third age or the demographic characteristics of people who join U3A and other organisations in later life.

The role of the University of the Third Age in meeting the needs of adult learners in Victoria, Australia (Lydia Hebestreit, 2008)



U3A Network Victoria

In Australia, Lydia Hebestreit explored the contributions of the U3A to the educational needs of older adults in Victoria and evaluated the benefits U3A members perceived from their participation in U3A using a literature study and original research such as interviews. The study examined different models of U3A that had developed in France, Britain and Australia and also hybrid U3A models.

The findings indicated that members were very satisfied with their U3A experiences. However, the research identified some problems experienced by U3As such as obtaining tutors and availability of classrooms, and found that lack of awareness and negative past educational experiences could represent barriers to joining U3A. Based on the findings, recommendations were made for further research and for improved practice in the U3A environment as a means to enhance quality of life in older adults.¹²

Section 5. Developing your research project: ideas to get you going

There are various ways to develop a research project, but the following ideas should help you to start planning. Much of the information in this section will also be relevant to Shared Learning Projects (see 5.2). For further advice please contact your Research Ambassador or Regional Shared Learning Project Co-ordinator (see 6.1 and 6.2).

5.1 U3A-led research

5.1.1 Getting people together

If you have an idea for a piece of research, discuss it with other U3A members who may have an interest – including your committee and regional Research Ambassador or Shared Learning Project Co-ordinator.

Working as a team can be great fun and sharing ideas can be very helpful. Consider the best way to let people know about your interests and ideas. You can use your local U3A newsletter, website or events such as talks to let people know that you are setting up a group.

At your first meeting, find out what people's interests are and whether they have any relevant experience, knowledge, information, skills or contacts, and identify gaps that need to be filled. Decide who will be responsible for leading the research and who will be helping to facilitate or communicate. Specific roles will emerge as the project progresses.

Getting an idea of people's availability at this stage will be helpful so that you can arrange meetings and develop a realistic time-frame for your project.

Find out the best way for group members to communicate. This may be through email, telephone or social media.

Consider how often and where you want to meet – this will vary according to the nature of the project and may change as it develops. Your committee may be able to help with venues if necessary. If working with other U3As or external organisations, they may also be able to help.

5.1.2 Developing your topic

Although you may already have a general topic in mind, it may be quite fluid at this stage. With your group, consider as many aspects as you can. Think about the knowledge your research is likely to yield as well as the potential uses and beneficiaries of your research.

To help you decide exactly what your research project will focus on, find out what information is already available on the topic you are interested in. Section 8 of this guide lists a number of useful resources. Use the U3A National Research Database (para 8.2) to check on relevant U3A research that has already been done or is ongoing. You may also wish to talk to the relevant U3A National Subject Adviser (para 8.4), regional Research Ambassador or Shared Learning Co-ordinators (paras 6.1 and 6.2).

In addition don't forget to contact other organisations that may be interested and able to help.

5.1.3 Choosing realistic objective/s

Once you have decided on a topic you can begin to focus on your objective/s, which means deciding what you want to achieve through your research. Having narrowed your focus, you can begin to firm up the question/s which the research sets out to answer.

Get your group to write down as many ideas for research questions as they can in a spirit of creativity. You can write and rewrite them until you have one/s you feel you can work with. Your research question/s should be:

- Adequately focused
- Feasible within your available time and resources

When you are able to state exactly what you are trying to find out you will be able to plan how to go about doing it with the resources and in the time available. Discuss progress with your committee and others with an interest in the results.



Emily liked the idea of doing some research on the history of a small local hospital which had recently been refurbished and extended. No written history was available but a great deal of information could be found in the local archives, books and from other sources. She got together with members of her local U3A History Group with a view to researching the history of the building. The group decided to focus on the use made of the hospital during the Second World War, as there was a lot of material in the local archives about this. After some discussion, the group selected as their research question 'What is known about the use of Westerling Hospital during the years 1938-45?'

5.1.4 Selecting a research method

A research method is a way of going about research, and a wide variety of methods is available. U3A members are likely to become involved in many types of research and it is not possible here to give detailed information on all the methods available. There are many excellent sources on specific methodologies (e.g. archival research, interviewing, questionnaires, focus groups, surveys, using historical documents or undertaking literature surveys) to which you can refer once you have some idea what sort of framework would be appropriate for your research.

Thinking carefully about what it is you are trying to find out should help you to decide on a suitable research method. For example, if you want to look at the views of all members of a large U3A, a survey will probably be appropriate, and you might also consider using interviews to obtain more detailed information. For researching the history of a local building, archival research would be appropriate. If you are not sure what would be most appropriate for your research, look on the U3A National Research Database (see Section 8.2) for similar projects or try the Internet.

5.1.5 Ethical considerations

All research must be undertaken ethically, to ensure that no person, animal or environment suffers in any way as a result of the research process. The extent to which ethical issues will affect your research will depend on the sort of research you are undertaking. For example, there will be few ethical implications if you are researching walks along local canals and rivers but if you are interviewing local people about their memories of childhood, you could be privy to some very personal and sensitive information.

Some organisations such as clinical research institutions operate strict ethical procedures. There is no formal U3A ethics procedure, but here are a few issues you may need to consider:

- Participants should not be placed at risk of physical, emotional or mental harm.
- Participants must be fully informed of what is involved in taking part and agree to participate voluntarily.
- Participants must be free to withhold any information they do not wish to give.
- Data protection regulations require that research participants must be assured the information they give will be treated confidentially and stored safely and securely. Think carefully about the implications of using real names and places — in some cases anonymity will be necessary.

In addition to the Third Age Trust Advice Sheet on Data Protection, there are also some useful guides to research ethics that you may wish to consult (see Section 8.10).

5.1.6 Target audience/s and formats for research outputs

Before you start doing your research you will need to decide on your target audience(s) and the format(s) you will use to share your results. Thinking about this can help to firm up your ideas about the sort of information you want to collect and how to go about doing that.

Here are some possible formats:

Written formats	Report Book Booklet	Brochure/leaflet/flyer Article Catalogue
Electronic formats	CD/DVD/Memory stick Information for website Database E-book	Film PowerPoint type of presentation Audio MP3
Oral formats	Conference Workshop Talk	Presentation
Other formats	Exhibition/Display Map (hardcopy or electronic) Diagram (hardcopy or electronic)	Course (could include any of the above formats) Game (electronic or other)

5.1.7 Identifying training needs

For some projects, special training may be necessary, so you will need to consider at an early stage what training the people involved in your research may require. If you are working with an outside organisation, they may be able to provide the necessary training (e.g. interviewing, recording information). Otherwise, you will need to identify a suitable provider of training.

5.1.8 Resourcing

In planning your project, you will need to think about what resources you will need. Consider how much time your project will require. What costs are likely to be incurred by your research? You may need to estimate the costs of: equipment such as recording equipment; computer software; travelling; stationery/printing; clothing and information resources. There is no U3A funding stream for research (although some support may be available for Shared Learning Projects — see 5.2.1). There are, however, numerous possible sources of funding for different types of research from other organisations (see Section 8.8)

5.1.9 Building evaluation into your research

How important evaluation is to your project and the methods of doing it will vary. Evaluation is not something you should think about at the end of the project — you need to consider it and build it into the project design at the very beginning.

You will need to define what your research is trying to achieve and set milestones for measuring whether or not your targets have been achieved.

Targets need to be SMART:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**elevant
- **T**imely

It is useful to keep a log and review how things are going at key stages so that, if necessary, you can make changes. Evaluation is an important part of the learning process and lessons learned will help others thinking of doing similar research.

Some general points to consider are:

Objectives: Were clear objectives set for the research and have they been met?

Methodology: Were there any changes to the overall methodology? What worked? What could have been improved?

People: Were there any management or interpersonal issues that might have affected your results? Were there any issues relating to skills or training?

Access to services/support: Were there any restrictions that might have affected your research results?

Data: Were there any problems with data collection or analysis that might have affected your results?

Timing: Was the research conducted at an appropriate time? Was there enough time to complete it satisfactorily?

Funding: Did you receive enough funding for your research? Were there any conditions of funding that affected the research methodology, scope of the research, results or dissemination?

Ethics: Did you fully address all relevant ethical issues? Did any issues or concerns arise during the research?

Presentation/outcomes: Was a target audience identified and reached? Was there an identified use for the research and were the formats appropriate? Did you encounter any problems presenting the research results or producing the desired outcomes? Were you successful in ensuring that all relevant parties were informed of your results?

5.2 U3A Shared Learning Projects

All the information you need to set up a Shared Learning Project with an institution or other U3As is available on the national website <http://www.u3a.org.uk>. Many of the points in Section 5.1 are likely to be relevant to U3A Shared Learning Projects.

5.2.1 Funding for Shared Learning Projects

If you are working with an institution, it may be able to provide financial support for the project but not for U3A members. Possible sources of funding see Section 8.8.

5.3 Getting involved in other people's research

Apart from SLPs, U3A members may get involved with research undertaken by other organisations, either as research assistants or as subjects.

5.3.1 U3A members as research assistants/collaborators

Here, U3A members help to undertake research run by an external organisation. They may help to decide on a topic or research question, undertake fieldwork, help in analysis or writing up or undertake other essential project tasks. Refer to Section 5.3.3 for questions to ask when deciding whether to work with an external organisation.

5.3.2 U3A members as research subjects

If you are invited by an advertisement circulated through U3A to take part in a research project as a subject, you will need to be clear what taking part will involve. See Section 5.3.3 for questions to ask when deciding whether to participate in research run by an external organisation.

5.3.3 Deciding whether to work with an outside organisation: questions to ask

Whether you are considering getting involved in external research as a research assistant/collaborator or as a research subject, the following considerations will help you think about whether or not to do so:

- **Importance/relevance of the research:** What relevance will the results of the research have to U3A members, Third Agers, or the community in general? Will they provide enjoyment and satisfaction, increase understanding or yield important information?
- **Adequacy of information:** Do you have enough information about the project in terms of its aims, methods, likely outcomes and how you will be involved?
- **Funding source:** Who is funding the project and does this have any implications for the way the results will be used?
- **Likely benefits of the research:** Who will benefit from the research?
- **Advantages of involvement for U3A:** What are the likely advantages of participation for individual U3A members and U3As?
- **Qualifications and allegiances of the researchers:** What are the academic credentials, qualifications, backgrounds and allegiances of the researchers and what other relevant research have they already done?
- **Ethical issues:** Have the ethical implications of the research been fully considered and explained? (See Section 5.1.5)

Section 6. Getting U3A support for your research project

6.1. Research Ambassadors

Research Ambassadors encourage all forms of research by U3A members and provide support, advice and information to ensure that all members who want to get involved in research can do so. They meet regularly to discuss progress in their areas and have an online discussion forum to exchange information and ideas. A list of Research Ambassadors is available on the national website <http://www.u3a.org.uk>. If there is no Research Ambassador near you, you might consider becoming one yourself!

6.2 Regional SLP Co-ordinators

Regional SLP co-ordinators work to promote Shared Learning Projects, supporting U3A members who wish to embark on a SLP and advising them on how to set up a project, including accessing sources of funding. To publicise SLPs, they also speak at local and regional meetings. The Third Age Trust website has a list of Regional SLP co-ordinators, a description of SLPs and an information sheet. There is a 'News from the Regions' page and a list of projects to date <http://www.u3a.org.uk>. Regional websites also give information on SLPs.

6.3 National Research Sub-committee

The NRSC works at a national level to encourage all types of research within U3A. See details on the Third Age Trust website. <http://www.u3a.org.uk>

6.4 Other sources of U3A support

If you are thinking of undertaking research for management or planning such as a membership survey or market research, it is advisable to talk to those who might have an interest in your results. For example, a survey of members of your own U3A, which may involve members' data, will need approval from your U3A committee. If you are interested in doing a national U3A survey you would be advised to consult the National Office or National Executive Committee of the Third Age Trust. If they support your research, the relevant committee, Network or Regional Trustee may provide support to publicise your project and communicate your findings.

Section 7. We've completed our research: what next?

Research is only useful if its results are shared with people who can benefit from them! Having done your research, you need to think about how best to gain maximum impact with your research results.

7.1 Talking about your research

You can share your results with members of your local U3A at a meeting or workshop and with the wider U3A community at national events such as the U3A National Conference and Summer Schools. Regional U3A organisations and local networks may organise workshops, seminars or study days where you can share information not only on what you found in your research but also on the methods you used. You can also talk about your research findings to relevant external organisations and specialists. Depending on the research topic, some form of public launch event may be appropriate.

7.2 Adding your research to the National Research Database

Putting information about your research on the U3A National Research Database offers a number of advantages. Firstly, it will bring your research to the notice of other U3A members and the general public. This could assist U3A members thinking of doing research, facilitate networking, help to avoid wasteful duplication, and ultimately help to improve the quality of U3A research. It will also help to communicate to the general public what U3A members are capable of, and hopefully raise the image of U3A, contribute to knowledge in the wider community and generate new research opportunities. (See Section 8.2)

7.3 Writing about your research

The Third Age Trust magazines *Third Age Matters* and *Sources* carry articles on U3A research (See Section 8.3). You might also think about writing for local or specialist newspapers, newsletters, magazines, websites, blogs etc.

7.4 Copyright

Before using any written work, image (still or moving), music, broadcast material or other work it is important to check that it can be used without infringing the creator's copyright. If it is protected, permission should be obtained before use, and any conditions should be followed.

The fact that something is freely available on the Internet does not mean that it is free from copyright protection.

The National Office of the Third Age Trust has negotiated a number of licences that permit U3A members to use certain materials under specific conditions. Material published with a Creative Commons Licence can also be used, again subject to specific conditions.

In the Committee Reference File, under Committee Responsibilities, there is an Advice Sheet on Licences (C10). This can be downloaded from the Third Age Trust website <http://www.u3a.org.uk/members-area/document-downloads-2/committee-reference-file/committee-responsibilities/928-c10-licences/file.html>

If in any doubt, please contact the National Office for specific advice.

Section 8. Resources

8.1 U3A National Website

The U3A national website should be your first port of call; it has links to many other U3A resources, sources of information and contacts. <http://www.u3a.org.uk>

8.2 U3A National Research Database

The U3A National Research Database brings together information on past and present research by or about U3A. It represents an invaluable source of information for U3A members thinking about setting up or getting involved in research and can provide information on what has already been done, how it was done and what information is available on the project. Information can be added on your project at an early stage, so that other members can see what you are planning. <http://u3aresearch.org.uk>

8.3 U3A publications

Third Age Matters and *Sources* (produced by the Third Age Trust and sent to most U3A members). Both publications include articles on research and SLPs.

8.4 National Subject Advisers

U3A National Subject Advisers offer guidance and information on a wide range of subjects. A list of Advisers is available in *Third Age Matters* and on the Third Age Trust's website <http://www.u3a.org.uk>

8.5 U3A National Resource Centre

The U3A National Resource Centre based at Bromley has a useful collection of non-book material including DVDs, videos, slides, audiocassettes and reports in many subject areas. An online catalogue allows you to search for suitable items. Resources can be borrowed by members at no cost other than return postage. <http://www.u3a.org.uk>
Tel:020-8315-0199

8.6 U3A MOOCs Advice website

(<http://u3asites.org.uk/advice-on-moocs/home>)

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are courses developed by organisations such as universities, and are freely available via the Internet. The U3A Standing Committee on Education recognises the potential and vast number of such online resources, and has therefore developed this website to provide advice for U3A members, along with case studies and links to recommended MOOCs and other web learning resources. Some of these could be useful in research.

8.7 Resources from other organisations

Examples of printed resources (published or not) include journals/magazines, newspapers, books, reports, official/legal documents, maps, diagrams, art work, photographs, brochures/leaflets, posters, programmes, catalogues, personal correspondence, diaries and other assorted ephemera. Many of these resources are now being digitised.

You can also get information from radio or television programmes, podcasts and other audio or visual recordings, and a wide range of web resources (See 8.5 and 8.6 above). When using resources and ideas produced by others, it is important to provide proper accreditation (see section 7.4).

Objects, the built environment, the living world, experiments, observation and word of mouth can also yield rich sources of information.

Examples of local organisations include local government departments and public or private services such as museums, galleries, libraries, archives, academic bodies, hospitals, prisons, courts, charities/voluntary organisations, places of worship, media and businesses. National organisations might include any number of wider versions of the above. The staff in other organisations and your family, friends or neighbours can also be invaluable sources of information.

8.8 Some non-U3A sources of funding

- Arts and Humanities Research Council www.ahrc.ac.uk
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council www.bbsrc.ac.uk
- Economic and Social Research Council www.esrc.ac.uk
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council www.epsrc.ac.uk
- Heritage Lottery Fund www.hlf.org.uk
- Medical Research Council www.mrc.ac.uk
- Natural Environment Research Council www.nerc.ac.uk
- Science and Technology Facilities Council www.stfc.ac.uk
- Funding may also be available from universities, local councils, local trusts and many other not-for-profit organisations.
- If you are working with a partner organisation, ask them if they can advise on potential sources of funding.

8.9 Participatory research

- Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University/National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2012) *Community-based participatory research: a guide to ethical principles and practice*.
https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/cbpr_ethics_guide_web_november_2012.pdf
- Murtagh, Brendan (2014) *Building stronger user engagement in age research: User involvement and practice guidance*. Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland. <http://www.cardi.ie/sites/default/files/publications/card-user-engagement-age-research-Final.pdf>
- Murtagh, Brendan (2015) *Getting involved in ageing research: A guide for the community and voluntary sector*. Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland. <http://www.cardi.ie/news/gettinginvolvedinageingresearchaguide>
- INVOLVE (fosters public involvement in NHS and social care research) www.invo.org.uk
- National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement www.publicengagement.ac.uk

8.10 Research ethics

- Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, Durham University/National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2012) *Community-based participatory research: a guide to ethical principles and practice.*
https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/cbpr_ethics_guide_web_november_2012.pdf
- Economic and Social Research Council (2010) *Framework for research ethics.* www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics has a useful list of websites and web-based resources.
- Research Councils UK (2015) *Policy and guidelines on governance of good research conduct.* www.rcuk.ac.uk/publications/researchers/grc
- Association of Internet Researchers (2002) *Ethics.* www.aoir.org/ethics
- Social Research Association (2003) *Ethics guidelines* www.the-sra.org.uk/research-ethics/ethics-guidelines
- World Health Organisation (2016) *Ethical standards and procedures for research with human beings.* www.who.int/ethics/research/en
- UK Information Commissioner's Office. Guide to Data Protection.
<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/principle-1-fair-and-lawful/>
- Third Age Trust (2016) Advice Sheet on Data Protection (C09). See Committee Responsibilities in Committee Reference File. Downloadable from website.
<http://www.u3a.org.uk/members-area/document-downloads-2/committee-reference-file/committee-responsibilities/927-c09-data-protection/file.html>

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