

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Communications is the sourcing and exchanging of information or news to create a connection between people.

### **Related documentation**

1. U3A-KMS-DOC-014 Growth Matters
2. U3A-KMS-DOC-034 Group Leaders/Convenors handbook
3. U3A-KMS-DOC-045 Press Release Sample
4. U3A-KMS-DOC-063 Social Media Guidelines - coming soon

### **The benefits of good communications**

The continued success of the U3A movement as a whole and the health and wellbeing of every individual U3A depends, in part, on good communication. Clear, consistent messages, put out across as many platforms as possible will mean that you are reaching the largest target audience. An integrated, joined-up communications strategy ensures that the reputation and profile of the U3A movement continues to grow and thrive.

Communications work best when internal and external communications work together. Your members are your greatest asset and can be the best ambassadors for the U3A movement. Good internal communications means that your members feel confident to go out and deliver U3A messages to the wider community.

### **External communications and public relations (PR)**

Using a variety of communication tools will not only help you to reach out to new communities and potential members but will also help to put the U3A on the agenda of policy makers and influencers. This is about promoting our 'brand' and the messages of the benefits of lifelong learning and staying active in the third stage of life.

### **Your audience**

Be clear about the audience that you are trying to reach as this will help you to shape and target your messages. Your audience will include your members and potential members as well as external organisations. You need to think about who you currently reach and who you want to reach. Are there particular sections of the community who are not represented within your U3A? How could you reach out to them?

### **How to connect with your audience**

The skill is to find interesting and sometimes unusual stories which connect with the audience and illustrate clearly what the U3A movement is all about. The aim is to create interesting and engaging content which can be used on all your platforms.

## **Platforms and Techniques**

### **Website**

Your website is the showcase for your organisation and needs to be informative and interesting. It will also set the tone of what the U3A stands for, does and offers. Other platforms that you may use should direct visitors back to your website where you should have clear messages about how to join and become part of the U3A movement.

- Your website should reflect the vibrancy of the organisation.
- Whilst it should be informative, be careful not to post any information that you would not want in the public domain.
- The website needs to be kept up to date. Let members know where to send information they would like published.

**Remember:** Your website is your shop window - it is probably the first place many people look if they want to find out more about your U3A. Ask members for feedback about your

website. Take a look at other U3A websites for ideas and inspiration.

### **Digital and social media**

Consider whether you have the time and resources to do it properly, especially those people allocated to administer and edit the account. Often the mainstream media and journalists will look to social media to pick up stories, so it can be a good way of widening the U3A profile and advertising what you are doing.

**YouTube** is the world's second-largest search engine. You can shoot a video and make it easy to find by naming and tagging it. There are currently new videos promoting U3A being put on the Third Age Trust YouTube channel for use by U3As across the UK.

If you are thinking of setting up a **Facebook** page for your U3A there is good advice available at: <https://www.facebook.com/help/104002523024878/>. This website gives quite clear advice to charities: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-set-up-a-facebook-presence-for-your-organisation-guide>.

It is a very good idea to provide a set of guidelines on using social media for your stakeholders – including internal sites such as a closed Facebook page. This means everyone knows the standards of behaviour expected of them when using the site.

The Third Age Trust has partnered with **iDEA** which is a new programme that can help U3As develop digital and enterprise skills through a series of free online challenges and events. There are three stages: setting up on social media; social media ethics; and social media for business:

SOCIAL MEDIA SET-UP: <https://idea.org.uk/badge/social-media-setup>

SOCIAL MEDIA ETHICS: <https://idea.org.uk/badge/ethics-safety-social-media>

SOCIAL MEDIA IN BUSINESS: <https://idea.org.uk/badge/social-media-business>

In order to access them you need to be [signed up on iDEA](#).

### **Media and the press**

People are more likely to read and engage with their local papers and freesheets than to read a national publication. Some U3As have found their local radio or television stations have provided a very good way to promote events and their U3A generally.

Placing articles in free news sheets and community publications (such as the local borough council) can be very effective too. Some areas in the country are increasingly seeing smaller, crowd-funded publications spring up which are specifically targeted at a postcode area. These micro publications have a very targeted audience and often a large reach.

Writing letters to publications can also highlight your U3A - the letters pages are among the most read in many publications. (Remember, if you mention U3A then you are representing the whole U3A movement so be mindful not to express controversial or extreme views).

It is a good idea to have a designated media contact on your U3A committee if possible but most of all, to have a spokesperson who can be quoted in the press. This could be the Chair or Secretary.

## **Media releases**

A media release is a condensed story and obeys the same rules as a news story (outlined below). With a few alterations you can use the story on other platforms (your website or social media channels). The task of a media release is to tell the story, as clearly, simply and straightforwardly as possible.

### **What makes a good news story?**

Any story should try to contain at least one of the following angles:

- Human - a case study can make a story more relatable
- New
- Surprising or unusual
- Interesting - is it interesting to your target audience?
- Local - a strong local angle can make it appeal to local media and freesheets

### **What should be included in a media release?**

Media releases deal with what has just happened or is about to happen. Try to keep everything immediate and in the present tense. Use as few words as possible to tell the story tightly and economically.

- Headline – engaging and understandable.
- Explaining the story – try to achieve this, in an interesting way, in the first sentence as much as possible.
- Expand on the story - within the opening paragraph try to answer the key questions - who, what, when, where, why?
- Quote - include an engaging quote from someone relevant to the story and who has given their permission to be quoted.
- Notes to editors - not essential but can be useful if you want to put in things that you couldn't fit in the main story. For example, more details on a particular venue or how an event came about.
- Boilerplate – this is PR jargon for a set piece of text which explains more about your organisation and can be added to the bottom of every release. The Third Age Trust boilerplate says: "U3A is a national movement which brings together people in their Third Age to continue their learning and activities in a social and informal way."
- A call to action – this could be a link to your website with object of providing further information about your u3a.
- You may want to add the name of someone whom the journalist can contact for further information at the bottom of the release, with telephone number and your U3A's website.

### **Tips for writing a media release**

- Put the most important information at the top, and the least important at the bottom. Journalists often cut stories from the bottom up. If your release is journalistically written, it may not be rewritten; it may just be sub-edited and cut. Count this as a success.
- Think of who your target audience is and what might interest them.
- Think about the U3A messages. and try to avoid words like 'pensioners' and 'elderly'. We tend to say that third agers are people who no longer work full time or have responsibility for children. The phrase 'learning activities' is more accurate than 'classes'.

- Avoid adjectives like 'wonderful' and 'exciting'. People won't believe that something is exciting just because they are told it is.

### [U3A-KMS-DOC-045 Press Release Sample](#)

#### **Other considerations:**

- Write your media releases with care and ensure it is proofread by more than one person before submitting it.
- It is recommended that you build up a list of all local and regional media, with email addresses and, where possible, direct telephone lines for key journalists. Contact your local council to see what communications you can access via them.
- Try to time your releases with the deadlines for local press. (Journalist contacts can inform you of deadline dates). Avoid leaving it until the last minute as stories will compete for space. If you are worried about release dates you can use an 'embargo'. This is a statement at the top that the release can only be used after a certain time which enables you to put it out ahead of the event.
- Put stories on as many platforms as you can, especially social media. Journalists, especially local ones, trawl social media for stories.

#### **Photographs**

Attach a photograph that is relevant to the media release. Ideally it should be an interesting and clear shot that enhances the story. An action shot is best, but a photo of individuals will be fine as long as you have their permission. Try to send a good quality photograph – as high resolution as possible – because that increases the chances of it being used. No photograph should be less than 300 dpi. Provide a caption that explains what is going on in the picture and gives the names of everyone who appears in it, correctly spelled.

#### **GDPR and permissions**

Photographs are personal data therefore consent needs to be obtained to both take and display them. This can be in writing for small groups or individual photos. For large groups please ask people to step out of the shot if they are not happy having their photograph taken. You need to let people know how the photo will be used and who to contact if they wish to withdraw their consent at any time.

#### **Radio and television interviews**

Radio or television stations may request interviews for broadcast. These could take place over the phone or in the studio. Make sure that you are clear about the purpose of the interview. Will it be live or recorded? What show is it for? Will it be clipped for local news? Ask how long the interview will be and whether you will be on your own with the interviewer, or part of a panel. Always be clear what your messages are and what you are trying to achieve.

The main thing to remember is that most interviewers and producers want you to succeed. The clearer and more coherent you are, the better the broadcast result. Speak slowly, clearly and with enthusiasm and remember the U3A messages.

If the radio or television station wants to come to a U3A event, you should give them all the help and co-operation they ask for. This is excellent publicity for your U3A.

#### **Micro-websites and blogs**

A blog is simply a micro website. Blog styles tend to be more personal to the writer/organisation and create a powerful 'voice'. Blogs can be a platform to show an interest and knowledge in a subject. To see examples, the Third Age Trust has a number of micro-websites including:

- <https://sources.u3a.org.uk/>

- <https://plus.u3a.org.uk/>

You can find more about the range of blogs and subjects at the blogging platform

**Wordpress:** <https://wordpress.com/>

**Remember:** You don't need to be using a blog to use the same personal style in internal platforms such as your newsletters or for more human-interest case studies.

### **Public affairs and PR**

Public affairs describes an organisation's relationship with its stakeholders and the influencers and policy makers within the community. Public affairs is about increasing the range of those stakeholders and getting on their agenda at a local and national level.

**Remember:** When public affairs work is done well, it can help to raise the awareness and understanding of the importance of the U3A within the local community.

### **Internal communications**

Good internal communication can lead to a strong sense of community, interactivity, understanding and mutual respect. Internal communication is about making members feel engaged and part of the U3A movement.

Communication platforms which help strengthen and enhance engagement include the following:

#### **Newsletters**

This can be one of the most effective ways to communicate with your membership and to share information and stories about the movement. Take time to look at other examples and share best practice. You can sign up to the national newsletter at:  
<https://u3a.org.uk/newsletter>.

#### **Social media**

Internal platforms such as a closed Facebook or WhatsApp group can make communicating both speedy and efficient to a large number of people. This could be used for individual groups or the U3A as a whole. For a Facebook page, the administrators can set the tone of behaviour and ethics of the group and take down any posts which don't reach the standards expected.

#### **Email**

Emails are an effective means of communicating information quickly to large numbers of people. It is important not to overload your members with messages or to send content that doesn't relate to their membership. For those who are not online it may be appropriate to inform them about facilities available at local libraries and/or consider the distribution of hard copies.

#### **Website**

Your website is a really good way of sharing information with your members.

### **Improving internal communications**

#### **Within the committee**

Be proactive when you receive information from National Office. Discuss the contents at the committee meeting, inform members by email and/or consider having a section of your website for committee use. Copies of National Office mailings are available for download in the members area of the national website.

#### **Within your U3A**

- Consider having a newsletter editor – this doesn't have to be a committee role, but a committee member should sign off content.
- Make sure your members can access the newsletter and that it is an interesting read. Have copies available at your monthly meeting and post it on your website.
- Have a 'committee column' in the newsletter to keep members informed of what the committee is doing and decisions made at meetings.
- Inform your membership about what is happening at a local, regional and national level so that they feel part of the wider U3A movement.
- Encourage members to sign up to direct mailing of Third Age Matters.
- Produce a members' handbook.
- Compile a welcome pack for new members including a members' handbook.
- Organise a telephone tree (i.e. the committee phones the group convenors, who then phone their group members). This can be a useful way of communicating quickly especially in emergency situations.

## **Meetings**

- Make sure that general meetings are held in a place which is accessible for all e.g. non-drivers and disabled members.
- Ensure that it has comfortable seating and if possible, kitchen facilities and a good sound system with an induction loop.
- Notice boards are useful, but it is easier to have your own folding boards.
- Consider having a suggestion box.
- The programme should be interesting to encourage attendance, with good speakers and sufficient time for notices, reports, discussion, questions and socialising.
- Use the opportunity to welcome new members and introduce them to others. Encourage potential new members to join by having committee members chat to them about the benefits of U3A membership.
- Use a 'meet and greet' system with two people assigned to look out for new members. Introduce them to one or two existing members and set up a buddy system so they have somebody to go to with their queries.
- New member get-togethers with committee members and group convenors can be really welcoming and reassuring. These could be in the form of coffee mornings.
- Have regular meetings with group convenors to allow them to communicate with each other as well as catching up on current issues and future plans. It is also important to remind them how vital they are to the U3A. You could consider organising an event to thank them for their hard work, such as an annual lunch.
- Have a regular slot at monthly meetings to fill your members in on what the committee has been doing.
- Invite interested members to attend committee meetings as observers which will help avoid a "them and us" situation and possibly encourage future volunteers for the committee.

**Remember:** Whatever platform you use don't forget you are promoting the messages of the movement, these include:

- Life-long learning
- Participative learning
- Friendship
- Fun
- Learning in a sociable way
- Giving structure after retirement