

NEW LOOK FOR u3a NATIONALLY

The Third Age Trust, which is the overarching body for all the u3as in Britain – well over a thousand currently – has been working for the last two years on a major project of consultation and modernisation. This has involved focus groups right round the countries and regions of both current members and people who might potentially become members.

These focus groups have confirmed the feeling amongst many that u3a is not inclusive enough, and only caters for part of the population. They confirm that there is a need and desire for u3a to become wider in its outlook, and also to try to get slightly younger members – still people no longer in full time work or bringing up young children. There is no upper or lower age for membership and that will not change. The relatively new phrase to use is “learn, laugh, live” (all in lower case with commas). The Trust set up a small Communications and External Affairs committee, which directly reports to the national board. It is this committee that is driving the forward momentum of the Trust, and organised the various focus groups. Various things have been decided after consultation – a national u3a day was organised, which sadly had to be postponed due to Covid and will now take place next June. Other things include a new logo, fonts, designs and a slight change of colours, all inspired by an external agency. A new website landing page is being launched and the large number of pages on the site are being updated. New branding guidelines have been produced to help u3as keep in line with the corporate look. A new wholly owned commercial arm is being opened to cater for the demand members have for banners, flags, tablecloths, posters and promotional materials, some of which may be able to include local people and locations. It will also sell badges, mugs, pens and various gifts.

Promoting u3a at all levels is very important. Currently all PR and press enquiries are dealt with by a team of only two staff, but they are now being augmented by a number of regional support volunteers, all trained in this kind of work.

Whilst every u3a in Britain is an independent charity, there are clear benefits to having a major corporate style, and the Trust is determined that it will properly reflect the vast range of different u3as in the country. The problem is that no two are the same – most meet in each others homes and a range of different village halls and it is only a tiny number that have a hub as we do at the Maltings. Some meet in cafes, and several are likely to hold virtual meetings permanently. Trust u3a has been formed, to accommodate members unable to get to a u3a, which is starting to widen its reach around the country by offering national groups on line.

Memberships vary too, from some on small Scottish islands with a handful of members to major city locations with membership in the thousands. It is not easy to accommodate these variations but the lively style that u3a is adopting will certainly work towards this. The range of interest groups is immense of course, and covers a vast array of subjects.

This only touches the surface of the work the Communications and External Affairs committee has carried out and it will continue to implement new ideas and initiatives in the years ahead.

For now, though, look out for and use the new logo, the dynamic colours and fonts and continue to enjoy your u3a.