



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

**MEN AND U3A
(short version)**

**Catherine Ware
Merton U3A
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1. INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2012 Merton U3A's Committee asked a small working group of members to review our existing communication resources and methodologies, identify areas for improvement, and make recommendations for more effective communication with members and the community.

It was agreed that, whilst the organisation was thriving with over 800 members, there were particular concerns that some groups in the community — men, residents of the eastern part of the borough, and ethnic minority groups — seemed to be under-represented in the membership. In order to develop a strategy, we needed to investigate the degree and reasons for any under-representation. This investigation into the gender imbalance has also shed some light on the other areas of under-representation.

Our research began with the under-representation of men in Merton U3A, but in order to determine how we compare with other U3As, we contacted neighbouring U3As within the Surrey Network and London Region network to which we belong, and found that we were not alone in our concern — in fact, as our research progressed, it transpired that male under-representation is a concern not only throughout U3A but also in other organisations focused on older people, and adult education, so this paper also draws on contributions from national and international sources.

We are very grateful to the U3As in Surrey and London that have shared data with us so far, and for the support we have received by email, telephone and in person from individual members including founding members Dianne Norton and Audrey Cloet who contributed valuable historical insights. Ian Searle explained developments in online courses. Gwen Wright and Janet Whitehouse on the National Executive Committee have also provided support and an interest in taking this research further. The names of other personal contributors are also given with the references at the end of this paper.

In order to put U3A into context and investigate whether there were particular issues that differentiate U3A from other learning and leisure options for men, we also conducted a literature review and contacted some other organisations. We have had helpful correspondence and conversations with several members of the Association for Education and Ageing, to whom we are very grateful, and we have drawn heavily on contributions from Jim Soulsby and Marvin Formosa. Valuable contact has also been made with Sara Arber at the Centre for Research on Ageing and Gender at the University of Surrey, and Andrew Lewis at the Open University. The names of other personal contributors are also given with the references at the end of this paper.

This paper also includes a literature review of English-language sources with some analysis of recent UK census data. Our research has focused on the UK and countries that have adopted the British U3A model based on self-help voluntary groups (rather than the original French model that is driven/supported by higher education institutions). Main references are given at the end of this paper.

Charts and maps convey a lot of information but have been put into a separate document of Appendices so that it's easier to refer to them alongside while reading the main document.

The conclusions and recommendations are intended to assist with forward planning at Merton U3A, and include ideas for collaboration with other U3As and other organisations. While the focus of this research has been to identify issues relating to the under-representation of men in Merton U3A, we feel that some of our findings have broader implications, not only for the U3A movement, but also for older adult education in general — but that is for others to take forward at national level.

2. THE PROBLEM/WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED?

- a)** Men are significantly outnumbered by women in Merton U3A, and this is thought to be off-putting and self-perpetuating. The Committee has become aware that men are occasionally made to feel unwelcome, but women have also expressed unease about the gender imbalance. U3A is missing out on what men could contribute socially and intellectually, and there is some concern that men may be missing out on what they could gain from U3A.
- b)** U3A aims to be inclusive, but the gender balance in Merton U3A is not representative of the demographic situation in Merton. It appears that U3A is not attractive to men, but we need to understand the reasons for this and assess whether there is an unfulfilled market need, and if so, what can be done about it.
- c)** The 'baby boomer' generation is now retiring, and the life expectancy of men is rapidly catching up with that of women. If the organisation is to thrive, we need to be able to meet the requirements of this younger generation of men which are different from those of older generations, and we can expect greater numbers of men who will also be active for longer.

3. CONCLUSIONS

a) What are the factors affecting learning/leisure activities of older men?

Despite the relative paucity of data, the literature review has revealed a number of inter-related factors that are considered to affect the take up of learning and leisure activities by men in later life. These include age, psychology of masculinity, male social networking, marital status, educational experience, employment/retirement, and 'social class'.

Several of the terms — Third Age, Social class, Learning, and Leisure — are difficult to define, and this has complicated the research as survey results may differ or be open to different interpretation. Nevertheless, the following are some key findings from the literature review that seem pertinent to men and U3A:

- Men are socially more self-sufficient and less inter-dependent than women, so they are less likely to join organisations primarily for social reasons. On retirement, it seems that women miss the social interaction of working life more than men (Skipton 2013b) and seek to develop new social contacts. Married men generally have larger social networks, mainly led by their wives; however, widowers prefer smaller social networks of family and close friends. Divorced men and bachelors are the most difficult to recruit.
- Men will join organisations and activities that resonate with their identities and interests. Work is central to men's identities and often influences their choices in retirement; they often retain old connections and organisational memberships, and identify less than women with their local neighbourhood until older age (Lofts 2013). Their leisure pursuits are more likely to follow what people consider to be acceptably masculine although this may vary with age, social class and abilities.
- Organisations and services geared specifically to older people are largely rejected by older men because they are regarded as passive and feminised. Men prefer intergenerational activities and to mix with the real world.
- Middle class men and those with higher levels of education are more likely to take up leisure learning and other goal-oriented activities on retirement, whereas men from lower social classes or with lower qualifications prefer social activity that is not goal-oriented. Involvement of men in organisational activity is strongly linked to 'Social class'.
- A shift in government policy and funding since 2009 has emphasised skills training (primarily benefiting younger people) and less support for lifelong learning. There has been a dramatic fall in numbers of older people learning through public providers, although universities and further education colleges attract some middle class men. Women are more concerned about finances than men.
- Increasing numbers of people are working beyond State Pensionable Age (SPA). Amongst those men working beyond SPA (65yrs for men), more are likely to be working in higher-skilled jobs. Those working beyond SPA are likely to be learning through work, and those in work are more likely to be learning than those who have retired.
- There has been a rapid rise in independent learning and a marked growth in numbers learning online, even amongst those aged 75yrs+. Independent learners are more likely to be better educated men, learning on-line or through TV/radio. Men prefer to learn formally, and are under-represented in informal

learning. They prefer more focused learning with clear outcomes (e.g. talks, visits, events, short courses, online courses).

- Older people from ethnic minority groups are also reported to be learning more formally in work-related settings, and online.
- 'Feminisation' has crept into the adult education sector in general, including organisations established originally for men e.g. Workers Education Association. Open University students are predominantly female (average 60% women: 40% men) but after the age of 65 the ratio is 55%men to 45% women. Even MensSheds are sometimes facilitated by women.

b) What do we know about U3As nationally and internationally?

There appears to have been very little substantial research published about U3A membership in Britain, apart from the works by Eric Midwinter in 1996 and the 2001 survey (summary of results currently published on the TAT website).

U3A surveys in countries such as Spain and Malta have apparently uncovered a gender imbalance, but this paper has focused on a review of English-language sources, and hence primarily U3As that have adopted the British model. Australian research is useful because Australia has adopted the British model of U3A and there are many cultural similarities (despite less social class division than in the UK). The survey by Lydia Hebestreit in 2006 specifically sought to investigate the differences between male and female perceptions of U3A, and the "barriers to participation with special reference to the male population". The results of the British and Australian research are remarkably similar, and the following is an amalgamation of key findings. (Detailed statistics are given in the main body of this report)

i. Membership profile:

- U3As everywhere are highly 'feminised'. Ratio of men:women is about 1:3. This ratio has persisted since the U3A movement was established.
- Average age of members is thought to be around 70yrs+.
- Mostly married couples and widowed/divorced/single women. (More married men than married women)
- Most have some form of education beyond school (more men than women)
- Largely middle class: about 45% professional (roughly equal for men and women), 25% administrative (more women than men), 15% managerial (more men than women), the balance technical, manual or occasional/no employment.
- Reasons for joining: Men mainly to gain more knowledge; women mainly for personal satisfaction and making new friends.
- The majority hear about U3A by word of mouth. Other sources include libraries (more women than men) or local press. Hardly anyone hears about U3A through national media. The surveys do not mention Internet.
- Main reason for not joining earlier: lack of awareness (more men than women)
- More men than women serving as tutors
- Men are also more often represented on Management Committees

ii. Institutional profile:

- Nearly 50% of U3As are located in areas with higher than average number of older people (Midwinter).
- Nearly 50% of U3As located in districts of middling population (100-200,000 people). Big cities are poorly served by U3As compared with smaller more compact towns (Midwinter).
- The majority of U3As develop in middle class areas.

- U3A is regarded by some to be both intellectually and socially élitist. Research indicates that the “university” concept may be daunting for those from lower social classes or with lower levels of education (but less inhibiting for men than women according to Hebestreit).
- Those learning ‘independently and with others’ now form 10% of older learners in UK. However The NIACE survey of Older People’s Learning (2012) reported that despite the rapid increase in U3A membership in Britain, only 1% of survey respondents reported that they were learning through U3A, which suggests that U3A members do not regard their experience of U3A as learning, but this needs further clarification.
- The predominance of courses from liberal arts and humanities favours women and is less attractive to men, especially from lower social class or lower levels of education.
- Main area for improvement suggested by men: types of course offered. Most U3As do not provide gender-specific courses or have a strategy for tackling the gender imbalance. Finding tutors is one of the biggest challenges for committees.
- Venues and schedules: Private homes are used in most cases but are not the most popular choice of venue. Men prefer traditional classroom/gender-neutral settings (Hebestreit). Weekday timings do not suit all.

iii. U3A in the Future:

The literature contains several predictions that the U3A movement, “as an organisation of the 1970’s and 1980’s” (Williamson 2000) would have to adapt to the needs and preferences of future generations. In particular it was anticipated that changes would be required to accommodate the large number of post-WWII ‘baby-boomers’ who had the benefits of better health, education, prosperity and the expectation of a long active retirement. However, most of the published research pre-dates or overlooks several significant developments in the last ten years which have had huge and inescapable impacts on everyone, including older people. These include:

- The rapid development of information and communication technology which has had a revolutionary impact on learning, social interaction and virtually every other aspect of life.
- The severe economic crisis and resultant cuts to public services and insecurities for young and old in the UK.
- The increase in State Pensionable Age (SPA) in the UK, outlawing of age discrimination, and the trend for many people to work even beyond SPA, albeit often part-time.
- The impact of immigration into the UK and the resultant cultural diversity of major conurbations.
- Increased life expectancies of men and closing of the gender gap even beyond 90yrs+.

Marvin Formosa’s *Four decades of Universities of the Third Age* (2012) provides a global overview of the U3A movement and a helpful analysis of current issues. “The key challenge faced by U3As is to remain in tune and relevant to the life-world of present and incoming older cohorts...” but U3As “remain locked in more traditional perceptions of late adulthood” (p.15). He makes suggestions on how the movement might be revitalised for the future, including:

1. To overcome the French-British polarities and working in partnership with other tertiary education providers (e.g. Open University).
2. To strengthen the quality and relevance of instruction, incorporating new technology, to accommodate the interests and skills of younger members.
3. To engage in the debate that identifies appropriate curricula relevant to the real learning needs of older people. (A ‘Third Age Curriculum’ was also proposed by Stephen McNair (2009)).

4. To add courses that appeal to excluded groups such as men, ethnic minorities and Fourth-Agers.
5. To introduce inter-generational ties, as proposed by U3A founders (most U3As encourage 'age-segregation' which is not good for members, especially men, or society in general).

c) What do we know about Merton and neighbouring U3As?

As has already been mentioned, this survey began with trying to understand more about the under-representation of men in the membership of Merton U3A, and this quest has led to a wider search for comparative information from U3As in the Surrey Network and London Region. It appears however that very little data is collected by U3As in general and the picture is far from complete. The following is a summary of information gathered so far:

i. Male Membership:

Total membership of Merton U3A is now over 800 but male membership is only 20%. Latest Census data indicates that the proportion of men aged 50+ and 65+ in the Merton population is 46%. Therefore, Merton U3A is not attracting a representative share of older men in Merton.

The percentage of men in the 50+ or 65+ age brackets in boroughs across London and Surrey is remarkably consistent at around 46%. The responses received so far from other U3As reveal quite a wide range, but the percentage of male members does not match the proportion of older men in the population in any borough.

The percentages of men in London Region U3As (22% average) are consistently lower than the percentages in Surrey Network U3As (31% average).

It seems that further one goes away from the centre of London, the higher the percentage of male members. The following are in the lead so far on male membership: Barnet (38%); Horsley (37%); Caterham (36%); Leatherhead (35%); Ashstead, Bookham, and Fetcham (34%); Sidcup (30%); Havering (28%); Orpington (27%); Bromley (26%); Richmond, Sutton, Abbeywood and Thamesmead (25%); Kingston (24%).

The average total size of U3A for both London and Surrey Network is 563 members, and there does not appear to be a correlation between size of U3A and percentage of men. Most U3As in the Surrey Network are relatively small. The larger U3As in London (Barnet, Bromley, Orpington, SE London, Kingston, Merton, Richmond) tend to be in outer London boroughs.

ii. Participation:

Men currently constitute about 20% of the Merton U3A Committee, but they are punching above their weight when it comes to group leadership (29%).

Our data on group membership, based on application renewals, is currently not comprehensive or reliable. We do not analyse the people attending talks, visits, social events. We do not currently collect data about reasons for joining/leaving.

Information has been requested from other U3As about the activity groups that are popular with men. Responses so far indicate that the following topics appear across several U3As: History (variations thereof), Science, Music appreciation (especially Jazz); Photography, Art appreciation, Philosophy, Languages, and Active pursuits (especially walking, day visits, gardening). Orpington have a men's golf group.

iii. **Demographic characteristics of residents in London and Surrey**

In an effort find some clues as to why U3As in the Surrey Network have higher percentages of men than those in London boroughs, further information was sought about some of the key demographic characteristics that might have an effect on the take up of learning in later life e.g. ages of members, marital status, qualifications, occupations/social class, retirement, deprivation, migration/diversity.

At Merton U3A we currently do not collect any personal data about our members apart from address, so it is difficult to analyse our membership (especially men) by any of these parameters. The same seems to apply to the other U3As we have contacted.

For the timebeing therefore, we are reliant on broad assumptions based on various demographic and other official statistics about the communities in which the U3As are based. It hasn't always been possible to find analyses by gender and age, and further research is required, but the following are some key indicators for boroughs/districts in the London Region and Surrey Network (see main text and Appendices for full analysis).

iv. **'The London effect'**

On average, the residents of Surrey tend to be older than the residents of London. There are also significantly more retired men (and women) in Surrey than in London, and there's a migratory drift of older people from London to the Southeast/East of England. Residents of Surrey are much more likely to be White British and born in the UK. A much higher proportion of Surrey residents is married (consequently there are also more people who are divorced/widowed) but significantly fewer are single. There are more residents in London with Level 4+ qualifications but that is most likely because they are younger and therefore have better access to higher education than older people have had – further data required on older people. Most people in London and Surrey are classified as middle class professionals, (the category from which most U3A members are drawn). However, there are fewer women in Surrey classified as professional, and there are slightly more men in Surrey who are classified as Higher management and senior professional (who are less inclined to join U3A).

In other words, the profile of Surrey residents closely resembles the profile of typical U3A members – older, retired, married (or divorced/widowed), relatively well educated, middle- to higher-middle class, White British, born in the UK, The society is relatively homogeneous and prosperous, and older people (including older men) identify more closely with their local communities – as Eric Midwinter observed, U3As fare better in small compact towns than big conurbations.

London residents tend to be more diverse in many ways. Residents of Inner London boroughs tend to be younger, more highly qualified, and least likely to be married or retired. The Outer London boroughs resemble Surrey to some degree, with several boroughs that have an older, more prosperous, predominantly White British population, significantly more married people, and higher levels of retirement than the London average.

Merton's profile is closer to the London profile than Surrey, but it has quite a split personality. The postal addresses of Merton U3A members indicate that the majority live in the western parts of the Borough of Merton, and that Merton U3A struggles to attract members from the eastern wards. The pattern of U3A membership broadly coincides with borough statistics on the location of older residents who are largely White British and born in the UK. Residents in the western parts of the borough also tend to enjoy higher levels of education,

employment in management and professional occupations, and low levels of deprivation. Further data is required by age and gender at ward level in order to get a more accurate picture on retirement, marital status, qualifications.

d) Probable reasons for under-representation of men in Merton U3A

- U3A is unknown to many men because publicity — nationally, regional and local — is very low-key and does not employ the messages or channels likely to reach or attract them. The reliance on 'word of mouth' is more likely to attract people who are similar to existing members, who are predominantly women. U3A is therefore "off radar" for most men.
- For those who have heard of U3A it is often perceived to be an organisation for geriatrics and is rejected by many people, especially men.
- More men in Merton are working beyond State Pensionable Age (SPA), and amongst those, more are likely to be working in higher-skilled jobs — these are men who would otherwise be possible candidates for U3A membership. The timing of activities during workdays may not suit the increasing number of older people who are working.
- If older men are not learning at work, they are more likely to be learning independently, probably on-line or through TV/radio, and do not feel the need to join groups (they are more self-sufficient).
- Activities currently offered by U3A have a feminine bias with an emphasis on liberal arts, and there is not enough to interest men.
- Men prefer more focused learning with clear outcomes (e.g. talks, visits, events, short courses). The informal, slow-stream, self-development style of many U3A activities is less likely to appeal to men.
- Many men prefer classroom-type settings or other gender-neutral venues for learning and may not feel so comfortable meeting in people's homes.
- U3A is primarily a middle class organisation with members from lower management and professional occupations, who have benefitted from a good education. Men who fit the typical U3A profile live primarily in western parts of the borough. Men from more deprived parts of the borough are less likely to join an organisation that they perceive to be élitist and goal-oriented.
- Merton U3A membership is currently highly 'feminised'. If they don't know it beforehand, men may be unpleasantly surprised upon joining to find themselves so outnumbered, and may refrain from participation except perhaps for talks and visits which involve minimal commitment. They are unlikely to recommend it to their friends.

e) What might encourage more men to join Merton U3A?

- More effective publicity — local, regional and national — using messages and media that target and appeal to men. Promote more lively 'can-do' image
- Activities that interest men; maybe some men-only activities
- More time-limited and focused learning options with visible outcomes e.g. talks/short courses/events/visits/online courses. Our offer must have "added value" that is not so easy to achieve or so enjoyable to do by oneself.
- Better use of digital technology and online courses to support quality learning and more learning opportunities
- More inter-generational and community activity
- More gender-neutral venues/ambience that men find congenial
- Scheduling of activities to accommodate working people (e.g. lunch-times, weekday evenings or weekends)
- Collaboration with other organisations to improve facilities, resources, and community outreach
- Involve more men in Committee roles and volunteering
- Increased male membership will hopefully have a snowballing effect
- Because of the significant social differences between the west and east of the borough, different strategies may be necessary, involving different publicity, activities, venues, and collaboration with different organisations.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED

a) Data required /information management:

As indicated in the main text and conclusions of this research, we know relatively little about the membership of Merton U3A, how they fit into the local demographic scenario and the external market. In this report, it's been necessary to rely on statistical analyses and literature to draw assumptions about our membership, but it would be preferable to validate these assumptions through better data collection within the organisation.

Information is required about the membership, not only to check how it reflects market share (and hence the effectiveness of publicity activities), but also to help in planning activities and resources according to the varied requirements of members. For example, since interests and participation are known to change with age, it would be useful to know the membership age profile. Since so many people are said to be working beyond SPA, it would be useful to know how this impacts on U3A participation, and would help to schedule events at appropriate times. Information on educational, occupational background, interests and participation would also help to plan activities and resources for maximum benefit. Understanding reasons for joining or leaving also helps to monitor whether there are special issues that need attention.

It is therefore recommended that we collect the following data about our members:

- **Demographic:** age, marital status, qualifications; employment (past/present), interests; participation in non-U3A organisations or learning activities;
- **Participation:** how did they hear about U3A; reasons for joining/leaving; participation in groups, talks, visits, social activities; participation in committee/ tutoring or other U3A support roles; volunteering

The methodology for doing this needs to be considered carefully. We could collect some data by amending Application/Renewal forms. Data about participation could be collected through Group Leaders and organisers of Talks, Visits, Study Days/Shared Learning projects, social events etc. Alternatively we may opt to conduct a properly-constructed survey (as a good example, see the methodology used by Lydia Heberstreit)

Keeping a central collection of research and other management information (preferably on-line so that it is more accessible) would provide continuity over the years to help new Committee members come up to speed more quickly, help to monitor trends in changing times, and strengthen understanding about what works/what doesn't work. This is even more important for larger U3As.

b) External research

Assumptions have been made in this report, based on statistical analyses and a broad literature review, but we would need to undertake local market research to truly understand why older men in Merton are rejecting U3A.

It would be useful to work in conjunction with other U3As to design, implement and evaluate strategies in terms of what works/what doesn't e.g. Publicity material and advertising channels; Gender – based activities of interest to men; Online learning; Venues/schedules

Research might be conducted by U3A members as a Shared Learning Project (most research about U3A has so far been conducted by university faculty and younger academics). NB Coordination with Gwen Wright and Janet Whitehouse at regional and national level.

National research about U3A needs updating to reflect a number of changes in factors such as social attitudes, health and life expectancy, education, work/retirement, leisure, prosperity, and technology (the digital age which has developed so fast in the last 20 years) — all of these have a gender aspect.

As suggested by McNair (NOLS 2012), U3A needs to work with NIACE and others in adult education sector to clarify definitions of learning (including digital).

"The notion of 'learning' is problematic... it is clear that many people interpret the term more narrowly than intended and probably differently by social class. The arrival of online learning as a major new feature of the landscape appears to be changing how people think about learning, as well as how they do it. The nature of independent, self-organised, and online learning is not well understood. Its growth might indicate a decline in the social benefits of learning, which are reported by significant numbers of older people, and especially the oldest. Its relationship to the growth of the University of the Third Age also requires further study." (p.9)

Note: In a telephone conversation with NIACE, we were informed that the 2013 questionnaire for NOLS is very similar to previous years in order to monitor trends, but it will contain some supplementary questions relating to community learning and impacts. Follow up with Fiona Aldridge.

It would be interesting to research French/hybrid models of U3A that have a close association with universities etc., to see how male membership compares with the British model — since it would appear that men are more inclined to hold a formal definition of learning.

5. SUGGESTED INTERIM ACTIONS

a) Groups/Activities: Gender-blind/Gender-differentiated can both work, but it's important to have a strategy and programme that can be evaluated, and monitor what works/what doesn't.

Most U3As adopt a gender-blind approach, but this evidently isn't working because the predominance of female members is having the effect of 'feminising' the curriculum, and there is a need for the Committee to be more pro-active at seeding groups/activities that appeal to men (recommended by Heberstreit, Audrey Cloet and others).

Invite men to an event to discuss what sort of activities and facilities they would like, and make sure they are involved from the start of any special initiatives. Make the most of their skills and knowledge. Help may be required in facilitating discussion and seeding ideas, or negotiating special deals for facilities or activities. (women may be more effective at facilitation and networking to get things going — they even do this in the MensSheds movement). Suggestions for discussion:

- Talks/Short courses (tasters) that may be a way of starting an interest group e.g. Science/technology; Financial management; Health and fitness/First aid; Legal issues; DIY; Cooking (see 'Third Age Curriculum' proposals by Formosa 2012 and McNair 2009)
- Making use of U3A, OU OpenLearn and other online learning resources could enable the provision of quality courses to complement in-house expertise
- Group discounts to e.g. sporting events; industrial/ transport/ military heritage sites etc.

- U3A events using local parks, sporting facilities, pubs/clubs e.g. sports days/tournaments (golf, tennis, cricket, boating); quiz night; heritage treasure hunt; picnic; themed social events led by activity groups e.g. art exhibition; French/Italian social; wine tasting;
- Consider building some U3A teams to participate in local public events e.g. Pub quiz team; U3A boat in the Great River Race; charity walks/runs, cycle races. This could also help to raise the U3A profile
- Men have different interests and abilities according to age, fitness, education, 'social class', marital status – and they don't necessarily mix well. Consider different types of activity/venues to cater for these differences.

b) Male-friendly venues/social ambience: Venues and events need to be more congenial for men. Having the option of alcoholic beverages in addition to tea/coffee/soft drinks at social events has been suggested.

Hebestreit's research found that meeting in private homes can be inhibiting for men, who often prefer more neutral venues. These could be in a traditional classroom/lecture hall or more informal setting. Apart from community centres and 'Church' halls, potential venues might include quiet spaces in restaurants/café's, libraries/bookshops, museums/galleries, theatres/cinemas, visitor centres at heritage sites and parks/nature reserves, or sports centres. These venues will often charge for use of their facilities, but affordable group discounts may be negotiable.

The team at University of Surrey CRAG also noted that pubs/clubs are often popular, enabling men to connect with the world in a congenial atmosphere and avoid female-dominated venues. Tony Kane, Editor of Time and Leisure magazine, recently wrote about the current demise of pubs in general, but the opportunities they offer as a meeting place for many local clubs and interest groups. He cites the 'Hand in Hand' in Wimbledon which hosts 14 different groups including "poker, ping pong, beer tasting, squash, bell ringing choral singing, cycling, writing, quizzes and... Morris dancing".

c) Scheduling:

Many older men (and increasingly, women) work full or part-time, and Sundays can be a particularly lonely day for those who live alone. Consider scheduling some activities at lunch-times, weekday evenings or weekends.

d) Intergenerational/community activities:

- Provide opportunities for activities with local schools/colleges or youth organisations. e.g. talks (by U3A members), debates, mentoring and other volunteer work.
- Proactively involve men in volunteering opportunities for U3A, both internally and as representatives of U3A in community (e.g. environmental projects; work with older men in care homes, prisons)

e) Publicity:

- Produce a range of publicity materials and make use of channels that target and appeal to men. Promote U3A as a "can-do" organisation (get away from the old/ feminine/passive image). Humour important.
- Make contact and publicise through including online links and the people/places that men encounter in daily life e.g. bank/building society; pub/off-licence, newspaper/corner shop, barber, dentist/doctor, pharmacy, garage;

sports/fitness/social clubs, business societies, employers and any organisations with large male contingent. Note: men don't go to libraries as often as women.

- Retirement courses should mention U3A, although people who are self-employed and working for small businesses may not have the benefit of such courses.
- Raising the profile of U3A regionally and nationally should give more credibility to U3A and help with local recruitment. Consider working with other London U3As to promote regional advertising (e.g. Freedom Pass wallets; adverts on public transport).
- First point of contact can be critical and having a male member as the first contact point may help to 'legitimise' participation for some men.

f) Overcoming geographical differences in Merton:

Because of the significant social differences between the west and east of the borough, different strategies may be necessary, including different publicity, activities, venues, and collaboration with different organisations.

g) Collaboration with other organisations:

Finding adequate resources can become a problem as U3As become larger with increased demand for courses/activities, tutors and space for activities. This also puts more pressure on Committee members and others in a support role.

Instead of trying to preserve a strict autonomy or achieve universal appeal, Marvin Formosa suggests that U3As should overcome some of the 'polarities' between French/British models by collaborating with other tertiary education providers. Audrey Cloet also advocates collaborative working with complimentary organisations that have the resources we need.

Some collaboration is better done at national level for the benefit of all U3As, and Formosa points to the promising "memorandum of understanding between the Third Age Trust and The Open University... which may lead to better opportunities for older learners, to improved access of library and online facilities, participation in university courses and modules, and registering as students with reduced fees and different entrance qualifications."(p.17).

The Third Age Trust offers a number of online courses already, and these are increasing. In addition, UCL, LSE, the British Library, the BBC, and many other organisations provide live access to lectures, as well as podcasts and learning materials online, free-of-charge. Ian Searle is also compiling a directory of websites with online learning opportunities such as Coursera, edX, Udacity and TED Talks. The non-U3A Links page on our website should be developed further into a useful resource for member. In addition, links to U3A at national, regional and local levels could provide an effective publicity channel.

Consideration should also be given to collaboration with other organisations at local levels. In addition to the Workers' Education Association, local secondary schools and colleges may be a source of speakers as well as venues and facilities. Opportunities may lie also in joint-working with charities, clubs/societies, and businesses that have experience, funding, facilities and perhaps large male memberships. For example, the MensSheds movement offers opportunities to set up facilities for those with a more practical bent. Age UK has a programme for funding research other activities for older men. YMCA, ROTARY/PROBUS are examples of other potentially relevant organisations.

6. NEXT STEPS

- a)** Merton U3A Committee to discuss the report findings, agree a strategy to increase male membership, and appoint a member to be responsible for leading on implementation of the strategy, with a team of helpers, and working closely with other Committee members as necessary.
- b)** Share report findings with other U3As and personal contributors. Prepare articles for U3A Newsletter and Third Age Matters.
- c)** Work with other U3As at regional and national level to assist with further research, debates, development, and collaboration with organisations involved in lifelong learning, especially for men.