



Sevenoaks u3a – Survey analysis Results – February 2021

The Survey we conducted amongst our members in February this year gave the Executive Committee an insight into the status of our u3a which will be used in the relaunch of our u3a and for future planning. The survey was conducted at the height of the Covid pandemic and this was reflected in the comments made by some of members.

The survey resulted in only 152 responses out of a membership of around 900 members (17%). The information gathered could only identify trends. Nevertheless, the data gathered did reflect the National u3a survey undertaken recently by the Third Age Trust. Of these returns 131 individuals were members in our U3A before 2016 and were mainly from those in established groups. Of these around half were in more than one group but only 13 replies were received from recent members.

We know that 90% of our members reside within postcodes TN13, TN14 & TN15. The remainder live in other postcodes ranging from Portsmouth (PO), Redhill (RH), Medway (ME) and Dartford (DA). The introduction of new local u3as since the last analysis has had little effect on the distribution

Status of Groups

At the time of the survey we had 93 groups. This represents a 30% decline in groups since our peak in of 128 groups in 2014-15. By comparison our recorded membership numbers have dropped from around 1040 to 874 over the same timescale. Some of these changes can be attributed to more precise recording of gains and losses in Beacon but overall membership numbers are down. However, it is worth highlighting the National Office metric of membership to group ratio for measuring the health of a u3a. In our case, in 2015 our ratio was 8.1 to 1 but now it is 10.6 to 1, Indicating that with a ratio over 10:1 we do need to take action to refresh out u3a.

Level of activity – what do our members attend?

The poll revealed that around 50% of the respondents (i.e around 75 people) regularly attend the General and other meetings. We are unable to establish why a significant majority of our membership do not attend any meetings or take part in any groups. Some comments suggest, wrong day, subject not interesting or access to venues as a problem.

The recent introduction of the Miller & Carter Coffee Morning has shown a low turn out with only 8 members reporting regular attendance but as this event only started just before the Covid lockdown, consequently it probably does not reflect a true pattern of our members' activities.

The work undertaken by the Social Committee received a lot of praise. While visits and social events have been curtailed during the Pandemic resumption of these will form part of our ongoing plans. Members suggested a number of places of interest for visits.

Willingness to help

A number of members volunteered to help in various ways. These members are at the core of our u3a and without them contributing in some way our u3a will not be successful. The EC will be following up on these members and asking them to engage in our future plans.

Membership to Groups in other U3As

There were number of members who participated in U3A groups outside of Sevenoaks U3A. These were mainly participation in Knole groups but other local U3A's were mentioned.

Comments and Suggestions

Comments were made by 25% of those polled. Generally they were complimentary, appreciative and supportive of our u3a. The themes that emerge can be summarised as follows:-

- Communication – Several members mentioned that our U3A was not welcoming
- Meetings - More flexibility on meeting days. We have traditionally stuck to the fourth Wednesday afternoon for our General meeting and this is driven by the availability of suitable venues for meetings but perhaps some flexibility can be introduced by utilising Zoom especially for those who can no longer attend in person.
- Digital information - Comments have been made over better use of the website, social media and advertising National Office events. Our U3A is somewhat behind the drag curve in terms of the digital transformation and the Pandemic has emphasised the rapid change that has taken place in society. We need to keep abreast of, and embrace these technologies.
- Help on Committees etc - Members had mentioned this as a need but few actually volunteered to get involved.
- Some 32 new interest groups were suggested.

Conclusions

The survey has given a limited insight into members' views of our u3a but as we only had a limited response from the poll the EC need to undertake further work to establish the views of the majority of our members. The active members represented by the survey are the most active and participate in group activity with an average attendance of 2.5 groups each. They are also the same members who participate in the open meetings and visits.

The EC do need feed back on a our activities and as a first step we have revised the Membership Application process to identify the skills and interests of our new members. The second priority is to recruit more members to help with Group Development activity and the generation of new groups. From this plans can be formulated and implemented to make our u3a the success that it has traditionally been known for.

For the future there are some key milestones such as the Queens Platinum Jubilee in June 2022 and our own 30th Anniversary in 2024. If you have ideas how we can best celebrate these events than please get in touch with the Executive Committee.

A lot more can be done in improving the situation for our members but it will take time and volunteers to improve things.

Ken Brown Chairman
October 2021