

Generating opportunities with...the University of the Third Age (U3A)



‘Our Vision is to make lifelong learning, through the experience of U3A, a reality for all third agers.’

<https://www.u3a.org.uk/>

Begun in 1981 the U3A is a member organisation that operates on a voluntary basis. Aimed at retired and semi-retired individuals the U3A currently has over 1,000 U3A groups with 400,000 members across the country. As a university, there is a key focus on continued learning and the U3A encourages members to develop their interests and try new things through learning and sharing with each other. The U3A is a non-religious and non-political organisation.

Each U3A group is a mutual aid organisations meaning they are operationally independent from, but members of, the National Body, the Third Age Trust.

The structure of the U3A varies on a regional and local level but the table below shows an overview of the structure across the UK. The regional structure of the U3A follows the same regional groups as Shared Interest and Fairtrade Foundation.

Region	Number of networks	Information available on networks	Speaker list
East Midlands	5	Each network has own website, some with contact details	No
East of England	8	Emails can be sent to network contacts direct from the website	No
London	7 44 groups	2 networks have websites. All groups have websites	No
North East	7	Emails can be sent to network contacts direct from the website	No
North West	9	No network websites but there is a general contact form online	Yes - webpage + pdf
Scotland	51 groups	Most groups have a website found via a link from the Scottish U3A webpage	No
South East	10	Most groups have a website found via a link from the South East U3A webpage	No
South West	12	Most groups have a website found via a link from the South West U3A webpage	Yes - pdf
Wales	4	Most groups and all networks have a website found via a link from the Wales U3A page	Yes - pdf
West Midlands	8	Most groups and one network have a website found via a link from the West Midlands U3A page	Yes – (currently being updated)
Yorkshire + Humber	51 groups	Almost every group has a website found via a link from the Yorkshire + Humber U3A page	Yes – word doc

There is a map of U3As in the UK which can be found here though it is unclear how accurate or up to date this is <https://www.u3a.org.uk/find>

Networks are groups of U3A who have chosen to work together for support and mutual benefit. These form organically and not all are called 'networks'. Networks may develop and share lists of potential speakers. For more on U3A networks see <https://u3asites.org.uk/east-of-england/page/68626>

There may be activities at the national, regional, network or group level that you can tap into. We are exploring the national opportunities directly with the national office and will let you know if there are any activities you can support at that level. The remaining levels; regional, network or group, are best approached by you. The advice below has been gathered from fellow ambassadors and community supporters to help you make any approaches.

Speaker lists:

Generally, U3A groups have a monthly meeting for all their members. These may vary in focus from a coffee and catch up to having external speakers. The themes of these talks vary widely and may not necessarily relate to a study topic of the U3A, programmes for these talks are set by the U3A group themselves. It seems that these monthly meetings may be the most appropriate opportunity for you to try to get a speaking slot.

Groups find speakers through personal referral from their members or other U3A groups. Some groups also have a speaker list (these are indicated in the table above). These lists appear to be created by the groups themselves and may be shared between networks. Some networks have a speaker organiser who may accept offers of speakers.

Some groups may have the opportunity for talks of different lengths such as a whole session talk (30-40 mins) or a 10 minute brief introduction. This is best explored at the local / group level to find out if there are options available.

There do not appear to be any subject groups into which Shared Interest would fit. However, you may find this varies locally and there may be an opportunity to speak at a subject meeting or session rather than, or as well as, a monthly meeting.

Stall opportunities:

Some groups have annual recruitment drives, for new members, where the U3A runs its own stalls, but not necessarily events where others' stalls are invited/present. You may wish to explore these opportunities at your local level as this may vary by group.

Contacting your local group or network

Many groups have a named speaker organiser with contact details on their group website. If these details are publicly available (on the groups website) then you may contact them to offer to deliver a talk to the group.

You may be involved, or know someone else, who is involved in a local U3A and can refer you to the group speaker organiser. If their contact details are not publicly available, under GDPR, you will need explicit written permission to contact them to offer to give a talk about Shared Interest.

Things to think about when getting started:

- Do you have any contacts who are involved in the U3A – personal referral has been the way all of our volunteers who have spoken to U3A groups have secured their opportunities
- Do you know anyone else who has contacts who are involved in the U3A

- Be prepared to plan ahead. U3A groups tend to book speakers 12 months ahead of time. You may wish to indicate if you are available at short notice if they have a cancellation from another speaker.
- Approach your local U3A groups individually as they are independent groups and may not necessarily share information about potential speakers.
- Keep in touch with us and your fellow ambassadors and community supporters in your area to minimise cross over in approaches to the same groups.

If you do get an invitation to deliver a talk – tips from volunteers:

- The group may benefit from a brief introduction to fair trade, this will also help you ensure there is a basic level of knowledge of fair trade before you begin.
- Set the scene with a short quiz. It might help engage the audience and again helps you understand their level of existing knowledge of fair trade and any country specific case studies you may talk about
- Take along Shared Interest literature so you can refer to this and make it available after your talk
- The meeting will also be a social occasion for U3A members and you may get the opportunity to chat over a cuppa while there
- If you are given any flexibility on dates, consider if there is an event or occasion you can hook the talk into, i.e. Fairtrade Fortnight, Good Money Week and you can then use that to add context to your talk
- Some groups produce a regular e-newsletter to members and may be willing to include information about external organisations in that. Remember to get in touch if you do have an opportunity to include information on Shared Interest
- Having a personal connection can be very helpful and may encourage a response from the group. Some groups contacted 'cold' may simply not respond which can make it difficult to know why
- U3A groups may offer a fee which should be made as a donation to Shared Interest Foundation as per our Volunteer Policy
- Make yourself known as a speaker locally – you never know who is involved in what connections
- Demographic of U3A membership generally appears to be similar to Shared Interest's existing membership
- It is after all called the university of the third age, suggesting people going along are looking to learn
- Your local U3A may attend local events to promote membership, this may be an opportunity for you to find out more about the group and ask how to go about delivering a talk or running a stall

Don't forget:

- If you are offered a fee for speaking please refer to our Volunteer Policy on how to handle this.
- Keep in touch with each other, especially others in your local area, and us about your contact with U3A groups. This will help you share experiences with each other, offer advice to others and minimise crossover of effort so you are not approaching the same groups.
- Consider how you are making contact and refer to GDPR guidance before doing so.