

Sheffield u3a

Headlines from the survey of member communications

May 2022

In March this year we invited Sheffield u3a members to tell us what you think about the communications you receive and how useful they are to you, as well as where you would like to see improvements. We were very pleased to receive nearly 300 responses and we thank everyone who took the time and trouble to complete the questionnaire.

The main findingsⁱ

1. The majority of members who responded to the survey were regular users of personal IT.

2. We asked 'How often do you look at different sources for u3a information?'

On the basis of the responses we received it is clear that members access local communications to a much greater extent than they do national ones. The e-newsletter and Links are viewed at least three times a year by more than three quarters of respondents. By contrast the national website in particular appears to lack relevance to nearly two thirds of Su3a respondents, with 60% saying they never looked at it, and 45% said they almost never looked at the national magazine

3. We asked you to tell us where you looked when you wanted to find out what was happening in the u3a in the next month or so.

Here the difference between the usefulness of local and national sources of information is even more marked with, perhaps unsurprisingly, a very substantial preference for local information. At the same time a small number of respondents told us they weren't interested in this kind of information so rarely looked for it, or that they mainly relied on group members and group emails for the information they wanted.

4. We then asked: 'Where do you look for interesting stories and articles?'

This question showed a similar pattern to the previous question although in this case the national magazine is considered a source of interested articles by about one-fifth of respondents. As before a small number of people told us they were not interested in looking for this kind of content.

5. To summarise we asked: 'Which communication methods do you find most and least useful?'

The responses here followed the pattern that has emerged from the previous questions with three quarters of respondents saying Links and the e-newsletter

are most useful to them and nearly 90% saying the national magazine and national website are least useful.

6. Finally we asked for other comments and in particular whether there are any changes we could make to improve the usefulness and interest of Su3a communications.

In considering these comments and suggestions it is important to remember that almost everyone who responded said they used IT to access information.

Given that, a number of people pointed out that their main line of communication was through the group(s) they belonged to, or that they had no particular interest in wider u3a matters, whether local or national.

There is a notable divergence between those who said they would prefer a more strongly IT-based approach to communication, and those who had a marked preference for written material.

Comments in support of more IT-based communication included:

- 'I would prefer it all on Facebook or Whatsapp'
- 'Wild Apricot is an excellent source of information'
- 'I like being able to see EC minutes'

Other respondents urged caution in moving away from paper:

- For members who are visually impaired working on a screen can be difficult and tiring, thus restricting online access
- Some felt that widespread IT competence among u3a members would not come for another generation and that this should be taken into consideration

We were reminded that, for some, the open group supplement and the Friday lectures are important forms of communication.

And a last comment - a plea - from some new u3a members, to please help them understand how things are done in Sheffield u3a, rather than assume they already know or can figure it out themselves.

ⁱ More detailed tables showing the patterns of responses are available on request.