**HOW WE CAN HELP THOSE WITH SPECIFIC DIVERSITY ISSUES**

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The purpose of this document is to provide an aid for those in U3A who are dealing with members with specific needs.

No member of U3A should feel they are responsible for the care of others in the group but it is the nature of U3A that we make it as available and easy as we can for everyone

**Help for specific diversity issues**

**Sight loss**

* Although some people are totally blind (severely sight impaired), or retain only light perception, a much greater number have varying degrees of useful residual vision.
* Some people have lost central vision while retaining peripheral vision, while for others it is the opposite; others may have “blotchy” or blurred vision.
* Some people will have good distance vision but poor close vision, e.g. for reading, while for others it will be the reverse.

**Making open and interest group meetings and visits accessible**

* Members with poor sight may prefer to sit nearer the front (see also notes on people with [**hearing impairments**](https://www.u3a.org.uk/advice/diversity-and-inclusion/hearing)  and [**Notes for speakers**](https://www.u3a.org.uk/advice/diversity-and-inclusion/notes-for-speakers))
* Members with poor sight may appreciate help in finding a seat, or locating someone they wish to sit next to, and may welcome assistance with getting a cup of tea or signing up for other activities.
* Speakers using PowerPoint or similar should be encouraged to talk through their slides.
* Members may not be able to read a name badge or instantly recognise your voice, so introduce yourself by giving your name.
* When guiding someone with sight loss, remember that they take your arm and follow you half a pace behind. Do not propel them forward into the unknown.
* Try to reduce glare by positioning chairs with their backs to windows.
* On a walk or ramble, different members of the group can assist by offering a guiding elbow, if required, and information on approaching features such as steps or overhanging branches.
* Cinema or theatre groups should consider timing their visits to coincide with audio-described shows
* Book groups should check whether the titles they select are available in a form that the member can read, preferably on loan or at a reasonable price.
* Check that members with sight issues are aware of our [**Readability advice**](https://www.u3a.org.uk/advice/diversity-and-inclusion/readability) for members experiencing difficulty reading standard print or screens
* Playing cards are available with tactile or with enlarged visual markings.
* Many board games are available in an adjusted form.
* For physical activities such as yoga or Pilates, the tutor should be encouraged to verbalise rather than just demonstrate.
* Produce all written information in accordance with clear print guidelines and make it available by email or text. (See our [**Readability advice**](https://www.u3a.org.uk/advice/diversity-and-inclusion/readability) for u3a members who produce material for others to read).

**Mobility**

**Mobility problems may be due to a variety of causes and may include:**

* Diminished movement.
* Use of wheelchair, crutches, walking aid.
* Inability to reach venues.
* Inability to leave home.

**Making open meetings accessible**

* Review all venues in terms of steps, ramps, handrails, accessible toilets, lifts, easy opening of doors.
* Ask members what help they require.
* Provide suitable space for wheelchairs at meetings and offer practical assistance.
* Encourage carers to accompany a member.
* Look at accessibility implications for parking at venues.
* Make it clear what to do in an emergency.
* Suggest car sharing.

**Making interest groups accessible**

* Be flexible about meeting in members’ homes, are they accessible?
* Could the member with the mobility issue host the group?
* Consider meeting in retirement and/or care homes.
* Look for venues with easy access for those with mobility problems (libraries, cafes, pubs, local care homes, even some supermarkets). Ask around – one u3a uses a fire station!

**Dementia**

Dementia describes different brain disorders that trigger a loss of brain function. These conditions are all usually progressive, and Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia, affecting 62 per cent of those diagnosed. There are 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK; of these, 40,000 are younger than 65.

**Symptoms can include:**

* Memory Loss.
* Difficulty with communication and reasoning skills.
* Changes in emotional behaviour (becoming sad, angry).
* Disorientation (confusion about time and place, even in familiar surroundings).
* Confused perception of physical environment (e.g. a doormat may be perceived as a puddle)

Treatment focuses on slowing the progression of the disease and maintaining the individual’s quality of life.

Social isolation is known to exacerbate the symptoms of people living with dementia; the U3A can therefore make an important contribution to the individual’s wellbeing.

**Making your u3a dementia-friendly**

Understanding and support of the broad membership of the u3a are needed to create a dementia-friendly environment.

**Key Messages**

* Hope: people living with dementia can have a good quality of life, provided they remain involved in everyday life, including going to their U3A.
* Dignity: Be aware that dementia does not necessarily equate with loss of intellect and everybody is affected differently
* Understanding: Being unable to communicate something important is frustrating – especially so when this is due to memory loss or reasoning processes.
* Be a Friend: If you know someone with dementia, treat them as you always have done, show that you are pleased to see them or perhaps share a joke.

**Actions**

* Speak clearly and in short sentences.
* Listen to what the person is saying.
* A small amount of knowledge can enable a great amount of change.
* Involve the family members and carers, where possible.  Remember that a carer can attend with the member who has dementia and need not become a member and pay, but will still be covered by U3A Public Liability Insurance (this does not apply to paid carers)
* See if you can persuade at least one member to become a Dementia Friend’s Champion.
* If you have a carer/family member amongst your members, ask them to share their experiences.
* Organise a Dementia Friends awareness session. More information is available on [**dementiafriends.org.uk**](http://www.dementiafriends.org.uk/).

**Members on their own**

Most u3as have a significant number of members who live on their own and it is possible that the symptoms of dementia will first be noticed by friends at the U3A. If you are worried about someone’s memory suggest they [**read the Alzheimer’s Society leaflet ‘Worried About Your Memory?’**](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/download/downloads/id/339/worried_about_your_memory_leaflet_english_version.pdf) and see if you can persuade the person to see their GP and offer to go with them. If possible contact a relative. Bear in mind that the person may be anxious and quite frightened about this as they may be aware that they are having some difficulties.

**Making Open Meetings accessible**

* Encourage the member to bring a family member or carer with them.
* Have clear signage – for coffee, toilets etc.
* Don’t be afraid of saying the wrong thing, it is better to be friendly than to not speak at all, use clear and uncomplicated language.

**Making Interest Groups accessible**

* Use people’s names more than usual so the member knows who’s who.
* Explain the format of the group and what is going to happen in the session
* Be patient.
* Encourage all group members to be welcoming.
* Sometimes changes in someone’s behaviour may cause an issue; if this happens try to lead the member to a quiet space and sort it out in a positive manner with little fuss.

**Simple ways you can help people with dementia**

* Offer reassurance and understanding – put someone experiencing difficulties at ease.
* Communicate clearly – listen carefully and use simple, short sentences when speaking to someone with dementia.
* Be aware of the surroundings – noisy or busy environments can make people with dementia uneasy or add to their confusion. Consider how features of the environment may affect someone.
* Ensure any signage is clear and people can find what they want easily.

**Neurodiversity**

**U**To be fully inclusive we need to be aware of the difficulties faced by people who are classified as neurodiverse.

*Individuals who live with autism, or who are on the autism spectrum, or have other developmental differences are referred to as “****neurodiverse****”, whereas “****neurotypical****” is a term that's used to describe individuals of typical developmental, intellectual, and cognitive abilities.*

Autism encompasses a very wide spectrum. At one extreme, there are individuals who have a limited ability to communicate and interact socially, whereas, at the other end of the spectrum, there are high functioning individuals. Certain senior figures in industry and in the media have self-identified as autistic.

Asperger’s syndrome is often used to describe certain individuals who are on the autism spectrum, and generally, we should as in other areas describe individuals according to their wishes.

* Some neurodiverse individuals may come across as uncomfortably direct. This is because they process social signals differently to neurotypical individuals. A quote from a recent Chair of the Institute of Directors perhaps helps put this in perspective .”*If anyone disagrees with me, I want to know why because they are obviously seeing something which I am not “*
* Many neurodiverse individuals consider themselves fortunate because they excel at some tasks requiring long periods of concentration (e.g. code testing in IT). Some regard neurotypical individuals as having the problems.
* Neurodiverse individuals do **not** typically lack empathy. They sometimes fail to read the social signals correctly and may cause offence. This in turn causes the same distress as is felt by neurotypical individuals. Many high performing individuals will confess to “faking the social bits” whilst others will have other coping mechanisms. For example, smoking allows a break from challenging situations because of the need to go outside.

**Focus on Inclusion**

Watch your language! Avoid thoughts and phrases such as:

* Not one of us
* Not sure they would fit in
* Not sure about their people skills
* There’s something not quite right

Such thoughts can often lead to exclusion of capable individuals from roles and activities which they could do well and which they would find fulfilling.

Always keep in mind that neurodiverse individuals do not lack humour and often respond well to criticism. Constructive feedback might include:

*“Telling your Regional Trustee that you think that they are IT incompetent will not necessarily get them on side”*  
*“Pointing out to the presenter that they mumble will not improve their confidence”*  
*“Good point, well made, but is it relevant?”*

And – be prepared for a constructive response

**Race and Ethnicity**

It is important to remember that every Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) person who comes through the door of a u3a meeting for the first time may, by the time they have reached the age of membership, have been at the receiving end of multiple racial taunts, slurs, and possibly even violent attack based on their skin colour or perceived national or racial origin.

Just as we don’t need to know exactly why a potential member is using a wheelchair, the back story of their poor vision or deafness, or the age at which they first discovered or acted on their gender dysphoria or their non-binary sexuality, we do not need to know the details of a BAME person’s ethnic, cultural or religious background to accept them as a u3a member. We should accept each of our members on the equal basis that they have an interest in the topic or activity in which they are taking part, and welcome their participation, their shared ideas and experience and their unique perspective on life, on the same basis as we would welcome a person whom we identify as more like ourselves.

To ensure that BAME members feel at ease and valued, we should avoid asking personal questions about their origins, beliefs and experiences and never make assumptions about them. As with any other member, we can ask them tactfully if there is anything that they would like group leaders and members to know about them when they are being introduced for the first time and/or give them a chance to introduce themselves on their own terms.  
If any member has concerns or complaints about discriminatory behaviour, we must listen to them carefully and deal with the issues transparently; accept responsibility or blame where necessary and try to put things right without being defensive or self-justifying.

We must also find the courage to speak out if we become aware of a member exhibiting racial or ethnic bias or intolerance towards another.

**Advice for u3a members who produce material for others to read**

Nobody has to read the material you write, so you need to make it easy for your readers! Many people’s sight declines in later life, while others will have sight loss when they join u3a. When reading hardcopy, many such people will appreciate larger and clearer text. Following the guidance below will reduce, although never eliminate, the need to provide larger print or audio versions.

When using a phone, tablet or computer, people with poor sight may also use software to enlarge the display or access it through synthetic speech (screen reader software). However, it is still important to design your content as inclusively as possible.

**Tips**

**When writing text for hard copy, videos or online access:**

* Use at least 14 point, with a simple (sans serif) font, and make it fairly bold.
* Avoid italics or simulated handwriting.
* Use good colour contrast between foreground and background, e.g. do not use pale text on pale backgrounds or white text on pale backgrounds or pale text on white backgrounds.
* Maintain good spacing between lines.
* Justify text on the left but not on the right.
* Do not write text over graphics.
* Do not use blocks of capital letters.
* Do not create larger print by photocopying it onto larger paper.

**In addition, when preparing material for online access:**

* Divide your text up into short chunks, and use headings of different levels to separate each section.
* Put “alternative text” behind graphics, so that a verbal description is available to people using screen readers.
* Make sure each link is worded so that it makes sense out of context, e.g. “events”, “groups”, “meetings” and not “read more” or “click here”.
* Avoid the use of more than one column on the screen.
* Design forms so that they can be completed online, without the need to print off.
* Clearly label all your form fields if expecting people to interact online.

**For more information and guidance:**

UKAAF, the UK Association for Accessible Formats, is a major source of information and guidance. [**www.ukaaf.org**](https://www.ukaaf.org/)

Web content accessibility guidelines: [**www.w3.org**](https://www.w3.org/) › WAI › standards-guidelines › wcag

Resource/reference point for digital publishing: [**https://inclusivepublishing.org/publisher/**](https://inclusivepublishing.org/publisher/)

**Advice for members experiencing difficulty reading standard print or screens**

Many u3a members will be finding it increasingly difficult to read “standard size” writing on paper or screen.  There are a number of solutions that may help:

* A range of magnifiers is available for hard copy, and local NHS Low Vision Clinics may be able to assess you and provide you with otherwise expensive magnifiers on permanent loan.
* For reading a phone, tablet or computer display, there are a number of options. IOS (Apple) and Android have built-in accessibility features which either magnify the display or provide speech output. For computers, Microsoft has some inbuilt accessibility features, and a range of software is available to buy, and also some good open source software, which will magnify and/or produce synthetic speech.
* The producers of u3a materials such as newsletters can be referred to the readability advice issued by u3a on the national website (under Support for u3as/Diversity and Inclusion). You should also feel free to ask the producer of the material to provide a larger print version or an audio version.
* The u3a’s national magazine, Third Age Matters, can be accessed online for screen readers. From the u3a Home Page, click on Publications, then on “Third Age Matters for Screen Readers.” You then have the option of viewing or downloading the latest issue, and then if you wish accessing it through magnification or synthetic speech output.  We are hoping that this version can be enhanced to make searching and navigation easier.
* You can seek advice from a national voluntary agency such as RNIB. There will also almost certainly be a local voluntary society for blind and partially sighted people in your area, and they often have resource centres where you can obtain advice or try out equipment. These organisations deal with a wide range of sight loss, and should be happy to help you even when your sight is still relatively good.

**LGBTQI+**

Everyone in the UK has the right to defence from various prejudices, and the law is specific that organisations maintain diversity and good moral conduct. According to the Equality Act, 2010, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity are protected characteristics, and these characteristics are aspects of a person's identity that make them who they are.

Whereas for many years, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals have generally lived their lives unobtrusively, drawing little attention to their individuality, there is now greater acceptance and understanding of LGBTQI+ in the UK.  Nevertheless, there are some shared issues among LGBTQI+ elders.  They may have reduced extended families, which can increase isolation. They may be, or may have been, subjected to negative attitudes from others many times in their lives, and those who have experienced homophobia and suffered abuse may be traumatised in the longer term.  Those who transition later in life may lose contact with family and friends, and may in consequence lack support.  Moreover, those who have lived alone their entire lives may find it difficult to adjust to being with others in social situations.

**Addressing meetings of u3a groups**

While we realise that most of you may not need these guidance notes, not everyone has experience of speaking to a large group of third agers. We hope that these guidelines will ensure that all your audience members can gain the fullest benefit from your presentation.

You can assume that a typical u3a audience (or for that matter any cross-section of the general public) will include a significant number [[1]](#footnote-1)of people with some hearing loss who will follow your words by a combination of normal hearing, hearing aids and reading your lips. You can also assume that a significant number will not have full sight or be able to discern every detail of your visual aids.

**Helping audience members with hearing loss**

Please **do** use a microphone. It is important to do so even if you have a strong voice, not least because people with hearing aids can often switch to a loop system that is activated through the mike.

If at all possible, allow time for a soundcheck.  Please do not simply start your presentation by saying “can everybody hear me?”  Ask someone to stand at the back of the room to check if you can be heard clearly over the sound system.

Assuming that you are using a PA system or an induction loop or both, a lapel microphone is best.  If you are using any other kind, hold it close to your chin, but not so as to obscure your lips.  Positioning is key. The optimum speaking position is about two widths of the hand from the mike. Too close to the mike, sound will boom. Too far from the mike, the level of voice pickup will be too low.

A clip-on mike is used differently from a hand-held one. Clip it onto your clothing and keep it about 30cm/12 inches from your mouth so as not to create overload and distortion.

Then:

* Keep the distance fixed and speak normally.
* Keep your voice as level and even as you can.
* Face the audience,
* Speak clearly and keep reasonably still.
* If you need to move, don’t talk while you are moving.

Do make sure you know where the on / off switch is and make sure that the mike is ‘**on**’ before you start speaking.

If you are using projected visual aids, have your Monitor in front of you so as to avoid turning your back on the audience to look at the screen.

If you invite questions from the audience, remember that some members will not be able to hear a question posed from the floor.   Please repeat it before answering it.

If you are speaking from a printed text, consider having additional copies available to give to audience members.  (See also notes for helping audience members with sight loss.)

**Helping audience members with sight loss**

Please describe your Powerpoint or other visual display.  For example, say “this graph illustrates a 10% increase in membership over the past 12 months”, rather than “this graph proves my point...”.  Say “this photo shows the sun setting over Galway Bay, with a pink and orange horizon against a dark grey sea”, rather than “What a beautiful view!”

Allow people to come up at the end of the presentation to have a closer look at any objects you may have brought with you.

If you have hard copy handouts, please prepare them in accordance with clear print guidelines, **with a minimum 14 point font size**. In addition, have a digital copy which you can email to any member of the audience on request.

There is no need to shy away from words such as “see” or “look”!

N.B.  These notes are largely based on a variety of existing documents produced by a number of local u3a groups, to whom we are very grateful.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement

**Statement**

Ashfield U3A is a learning co-operative and membership charity which enables members in their third age to share educational, creative and leisure activities. Members of each U3A draw upon their knowledge, skills and experience to teach and learn from each other (peer to peer learning). \_AshfieldU3A recognise that some people are particularly likely to experience discrimination and harassment and are committed to making sure that the U3A is as inclusive and welcoming as possible.

**Aims of this policy**

This policy has been drawn up to comply with the Equality Act 2010. The Act stipulates that organisations cannot treat someone unfairly on the basis of what it calls ‘protected characteristics’, which are:

* ethnic origin, nationality (or statelessness) or race
* age
* gender
* disability
* religion or belief (including the absence of belief)
* marital or civil partnership status
* sexual orientation
* pregnancy
* gender reassignment

Ashfield U3A will strive to ensure that members do not experience discrimination on the basis of their protected characteristics. This will include ensuring equal access to groups and behaviour between members and by the U3A Committee Members and group leaders. The Equality Act highlights that organisations need to consider what **‘reasonable adjustments’** can be made in order to accommodate those who may have particular needs. The U3A Committee will review the reasonable adjustments needed for all members and individual members with particular needs on an ongoing basis. Where necessary, the Committee will seek guidance and additional support from the U3APlus sub-committee and/or National Office.

**Practical approaches to inclusion**

Ashfield U3A will make sure all new members are aware of our policies and procedures in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion and accessibility as well as the Member Code of Conduct. The U3A will make reasonable adjustments and take practical steps to ensure a wide range of people can participate in our activities and meetings. This may include:

* Consideration given to the time of day of meetings and their location.
* Consideration of venues for meetings including:
  + Accessible to wheelchair users
  + Access to PA system and a hearing loop
  + Parking and disabled parking available
  + Disabled toilet facilities available
* Publicity:
  + Using a variety of methods and platforms to communicate externally and raise the profile of the U3A.
  + Make communications available to those who don’t have access to the internet
  + Use a range of images that reflect the local community
* Recruiting new members:
  + Doing outreach sessions and contacting agencies working with community groups who may be harder to reach
  + Encouraging members who are representative of the groups who are underrepresented within the U3A i.e. men or younger members to assist with the recruitment process
  + Managing growth so that we ensure that new members can be accommodated
* Monitoring:
  + Ashfield U3A will monitor member numbers i.e. the numbers of members who join, re-join and leave each year in order to identify any trends in membership.
  + Ashfield U3A committee will review the diversity of the membership on an ongoing basis and will seek to ensure that the U3A remains attractive and accessible to all.
* Tasks and Roles:
  + Ensure a range of people get their voices heard by encouraging more members to take on roles such as leading groups.
  + The U3A will appoint an Accessibility Officer whose role it will be to ensure that both new and existing members can access the members meetings and groups that they would like to join and consider what reasonable adjustments may be needed to ensure this.
  + The Groups Coordinator will ensure that new Group Leaders are made aware of issues in relation to accessibility and what steps they may need to take in meeting access requirements. Each group will be reviewed on an individual basis as certain groups may require a certain level of fitness or mobility and members need to be made aware of this in advance.
  + Ashfield U3A will offer induction and training around equality, diversity and inclusion to Committee Members and Group Leaders on an ongoing basis.

**Code of Conduct**

Ashfield U3A has a member code of conduct. The code of conduct outlines that members should abide by the U3As policies and procedures as well as treating each other with dignity and respect. This would include not acting in a way that would be deemed discriminatory or offensive.

**Dealing with discrimination and harassment**

Where the U3A Committee become aware of any discriminatory practice or harassment, the committee will seek to address this through consultation with all parties concerned and, where necessary, through invoking formal procedures.

If any member of the U3A feels they have experienced or witnessed discriminatory behaviour or harassment, this should be reported to the Committee. Any matters of concern will be reviewed by the Committee and a decision will be made, in line with the U3As constitution and formal procedures, as to what steps will be taken to address the issue.

**Definitions**

**Equality** is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents, and believing that no one should have poorer life chances because of where, when or whom they were born, or because of other characteristics. Promoting equality is about behaving in a way that tackles inequalities, aiming to ensure that all members are treated fairly, and do not experience discrimination.

**Promoting** **diversity** is about recognising that everyone is different and creating an environment that values members and ensuring that the U3A Movement is as accessible as possible to different groups within the community.

**Inclusion** is about positively striving to meet the needs of different people and taking practical steps to ensure members feel respected.

**Direct Discrimination** is when a person is treated less favourably because of their ethnic origin, nationality (or statelessness) or race, age, disability, religion or belief (including the absence of belief), marital or civil partnership status, sexual orientation, pregnancy, gender reassignment, political belief

**Indirect Discrimination** occurs when a condition or requirement is applied equally to all groups of people but has a disproportionately adverse effect on one particular group.

**Harassment** is unwanted conduct related to ‘protected characteristics’ that has the purpose or effect of violating a members dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment is also unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has that same purpose or effect.

**Victimisation** occurswhen a member is treated less favourably than others in the same circumstances because he or she has made a complaint or an allegation of discrimination, harassment or bullying or given information regarding such a complaint or allegation.

This policy was adopted on: October 2022

Review date: 2025

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)