

Annual U3A Conference in Nottingham 23-25 August 2016

Attended on behalf of Buckingham U3A by Lorna Joy and Anastasia Kavanagh

Everything about the conference was great. The weather was good, no need for coats or umbrellas. Our accommodation was clean and comfortable, the food was excellent! Above all, the chance to meet with people from other U3As and talk to them about how they go about things was most enlightening, from the one U3A which has its own premises for all of its groups to the guitar orchestra who entertained us at the Annual Dinner in a very professional way, which started as a group of U3A members who had never played guitar before and got together to learn. Some of the things people are doing are really inspiring.

The title of the conference was 1000 U3As – What Next? And most of the business side of the conference was debating the way forward with some new ideas as to organisation for the future. This was quite difficult for us to follow as we didn't know all the things that had gone before, but was useful to find out how the National Committee of the Third Age Trust is made up and what its various functions are.

There were some interesting lectures: one given by a young professor on the future of robotics. This sounds random, but was very much about what the future may look like, with particular reference to some of the ways in which robotics will assist people with disabilities, from doors which open when you approach to helping people walk again. The second was a talk on Music and how it is being used in therapy for stroke patients and people with Alzheimer's. It was amazing to see people who could no longer speak, but could sing songs! Fascinating.

Workshops:

- 1: Getting your Message Across – some good tips on communication
- 2: Managing Growth – important tip – try to keep away from waiting lists
- 3: Moocs – which stands for Massive Open On-line Courses – this was an introduction to what they are and how they can be accessed and used by U3As. One interesting example was a U3A who simply have a Moocs group. They started all trying to follow one course, but as it is designed for people to progress at their own speed, they discovered this was not successful. So they all started doing what interested them individually, then meeting together to compare experiences on on-line learning in general, resulting in a few people following the same course then setting up their own group on that subject. I feel we could experiment with this kind of approach in Buckingham. Important names are Coursera and Future Learn.
- 4: Participating in Research – this session gave ideas on how U3As can get involved in Research local to them. It can be anything from helping in local surveys to actually

being involved in clinical and social trials as a subject. There is a great deal of research being carried out into Ageing and the Ageing Population into which we can all give input for future generations. E.g. there is a 20 million pound grant from the Government to fund research. This offers the chance to both participate and benefit from the results. There are Shared Learning Projects : short term studies which can be on specific topics in conjunction with libraries and other organisations in fields such as archaeology, botany and local history. Or longer research in conjunction with Universities on existing studies they are already doing. The U3A has research ambassadors. They can provide standard letters for approaching universities.

There were so many ideas and tips, too many to list here. But the important thing was talking to other people from across the whole country and hearing how they do things, and exchanging ideas.

Quote from Anastasia: "I strongly recommend the Annual Conference to Committee members and those who would like to be future committee members".

We were both grateful for the opportunity to attend the conference, it was truly a learning experience!