

Supporting Members with Vision Loss

The following advice aims to support U3A members with vision loss so that they can continue to enjoy and participate in U3A activities. Losing your vision can be an isolating experience but there are ways in which U3As can support their members to continue to be part of the U3A community and have access to the U3A learning experience. Members can experience a range of degrees of vision loss: having low vision, being partially sighted, being visually impaired or registered blind. Most members are informed about what their condition means for them and are able to suggest the support that they need but below are some general tips on how to adapt activities to make them as accessible as possible and some additional sources of information on vision loss.

HOW TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY OF U3A ACTIVITIES FOR MEMBERS WITH VISION LOSS

Awareness

The first step in increasing accessibility is for the committees to know which members are experiencing vision loss and what their needs are. The membership application form could be used to ask for this information, with an explanation of why the information is being collected and where it will go in accordance with data protection legislation.

Providing Accessible Information

When producing text documents, remember:

- Light letters on a dark background are easier to read than dark on light.
- Avoid coloured lettering other than for large text titles. Dark blue and greens are the most effective.
- Ideal font size 18, minimum 16.
- Use either a standard Roman or Sans Serif font; Arial works well. Avoid decorative fonts, use bold type, avoid italics.
- Spacing between text should be wide; text with close letter spacing presents problems. A mono-spaced font such as Courier, which allocates an equal amount of space for each letter, is very readable.
- Avoid paper with a glossy finish.

Consider engaging a volunteer to explain (in person or over the telephone) which interest groups are available and to provide information on whether they are suitable for people with different levels of vision loss.

Increasing Accessibility in Groups and Monthly Meetings

- Provide seating close to the front to allow members with some vision loss to be as close to visual displays as possible.
- Try to reduce glare from windows and lights, for instance by positioning seating with the back to windows.

- Provide copies of presentations for use on a member's own laptop, which is usually adapted for specific needs.
- Use a room layout that allows participants to use their hearing more easily to follow what is going on, for instance in horse-shoe or boardroom layouts.
- Ensure that conveners are informed of any requests for specific arrangements to be made in sufficient time ahead of the event.

The RNIB produces factsheets on how people with vision loss can continue to enjoy leisure activities, such as visiting galleries, going on trips and watching films and television, which could be applied to U3A group activities (www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/home-and-leisure). Full contact details are below.

Equipment to Consider

There is a range of assistive technology products available, such as:

- Magnifiers: these can be hand-held or digital.
- Computer software: can be used to convert text to speech.
- Computer hardware: helps to produce documents in easy to read formats by adjusting zoom, glare, contrast and style.
- Audio-description: cinemas, museums and galleries often provide headsets with an additional narration track.
- Braille technology: to produce documents in braille.

Further information can be found through Action for Blind People (see below).

OTHER RESOURCES

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

www.rnib.org.uk

Telephone: 0303 123 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Action for Blind People

www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7635 4800 or through the RNIB helpline above.