

NLU3A STRATEGY 2023–26

Background

The last review of NLU3A strategy was completed in 2018 to cover a three-year period to 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic intervened, and for some time the priority was survival through the upheaval which that created. As things settled down, the NLU3A committee decided it was time to review strategy once again. The committee analysed the current membership, the activities offered and external developments, invited suggestions from members and held a valuable discussion with group co-ordinators in June 2023. In the light of this work, they decided on the following strategy for the next few years.

Analysis of future needs

The number of members fell by 30% between February 2020 and February 2023, when it was 467. This is a perfectly viable strength, but there is a need to attract new members, particularly younger members who will fill the places of older members who leave over time. There has been a steady flow of new members, but more needs to be done to retain them: over a third of new members recruited in 2022 did not renew their membership at the end of the year. We need to ensure that our subscriptions remain competitive, that we are sufficiently welcoming to newcomers and that we offer a wide enough variety of activities to meet members' interests. In this context, we appear to offer fewer one-off and social activities than some other U3As.

The other main challenge is how to ensure we have enough members involved in the organisation of NLU3A to ensure its long-term survival. NLU3A is a membership organisation and has to look for its leadership within its members rather than recruiting from outside. We already have a high level of active participation – around 30% of members have volunteered to help us in one way or another. However, there remain gaps, particularly at committee level, and these not only restrict our ability to undertake new initiatives, but potentially put at risk our ability to continue at all.

The key priorities

We therefore identified three key priorities to guide future actions:

1. Attract and retain more new members, particularly younger ones.
2. Refresh the activities we offer, especially one-off and social events.
3. Encourage more members to get involved in running the organisation.

1. Attracting and retaining new members

Additional publicity

We will step up our publicity. Actions to include:

- Regular stalls at the East Finchley festival and looking for similar events elsewhere in our catchment area.

- Articles in *The Archer* newspaper and the Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association newsletter.

Subscriptions

We will aim to keep our subscriptions competitive and not allow them to rise outside the range of other u3as in our part of London. This will mean we need to bear down on all our costs. Actions to include:

- Limiting the costs of hiring venues for groups by using members' homes and free venues where we can, and not paying more than a fixed amount per head per year in other cases. This will mean recruiting more members to groups costing over the limit, moving to cheaper accommodation, reducing frequency of meetings or collecting a small top-up from members of those groups.
- Reducing the cost of printing and postage by using electronic communications wherever possible, including replacing paper membership cards with electronic proof of membership.

A warmer welcome to new members

We will further improve the way we help new members to settle in. Actions to include:

- Setting up a new Welcome Team, who will find out what new members are looking for and help them find activities which meet their requirements.
- Experimenting with new places and times for welcome meetings for new members.
- Finding ways to discuss their experiences with recently joined members and making improvements in the light of the discussions.

2. Refreshing the activities we offer

Looking for ideas for new activities

We will be on the constant lookout for new ideas for activities and for members ready to run them. Actions to include:

- Reviving the summer programme and repeating activities which are successful.
- Looking at the possibility of a gardening interest group.

One-off and social activities

We will try to launch a number of one-off and social events, which provide valuable opportunities for members to get to know new people and experiment with new activities. If we can find the people to run them, we will try out events at different times from the normal midweek daytimes. Actions include:

- Finding a regular venue for quiz nights.

- Building on the social events in the summer programme.

3. Encouraging more members to get involved in running the organisation

Creating teams to organise aspects of our work

We will try, wherever possible, to share tasks among teams, to spread the load and make them attractive as a more social activity. Actions include:

- Creating a welcome team for new members (see above).
- Looking for NLU3A members to work with existing committee members on issues like events, communications and organising monthly meetings.
- Reviving the Vice Chair role to share the Chair's tasks.

Keeping the strategy under review

The committee will keep this strategy under review at periodic meetings dedicated to the longer term. In the meantime, the committee welcomes any ideas from members about any aspects of the review and, in particular, any offers of help to move individual elements forward. The speed of our progress towards our goals will always depend on how much help members are able to give.

Michael Johns

Chair, NLU3A committee

August 2023