U3A Survey on the Regional Structure

Summary Report on Findings

January 2020

Background

In mid-2020, following discussion at Network Members Council meetings and other feedback, the Combined Regions Committee and the Network Committee undertook a survey to gain understanding of Member U3As' uses of the regional meeting structures.

The survey was distributed to Member U3As via Survey Monkey following each regional meeting in September/October 2020. It provided Member U3As with an opportunity to tell Network how they would like the regional structure to work, and suggest any changes they feel would make it more effective.

Two U3As were included in the analysis but ceased operating in November 2020 (Macedon Ranges in Loddon Mallee and Phillip Island in Gippsland)

A copy of the survey is attached at Appendix A of this report.

Current structure

Regions: There are currently five rural regions and six metropolitan regions, grouped geographically. U3As from each region meet two or three times a year at regional meetings. Delegates from each U3A in the region select a regional representative to represent the whole region at Combined Regions Committee meetings.

Combined Regions Committee: This Committee is made up of the 11 regional representatives. At the meeting on 23 November 2020, it was decided the meetings would take place twice per calendar year - after each round of regional meetings. The Network president and other members of the Network Committee can attend these meetings.

Once a year all U3A are asked to contribute their information to a combined report. This report is available to all U3As and to Network.

Response overview

The overall response rate to the survey was approximately 50 per cent – generally surveys receive a 30-40 per cent response rate. Some U3As reported difficulties accessing the survey via the link. The survey was distributed during a particularly busy time for U3As, so it is possible a number of U3As may simply have forgotten to respond or did not find the time. Network made the decision not to send email reminders to U3As, but rather to mention it in meetings/workshops as appropriate and in Network's monthly newsletter.

A breakdown of responses by Member U3A size at Graph 1 shows that approximately 40 per cent of U3As with less than 100 members responded to the survey, potentially flagging disengagement of this cohort with Network. In contrast, the highest response rates were received from U3As with membership of between 500-999.

The response rate by Region (Graph 2) indicates a low response rate from the Loddon Mallee Region (25 per cent). The highest response rates came from Outer SE Metro Region (88 per cent), Western Metro and Central and Southern Metro Regions (both 71 per cent).

Regional meetings and structure

Regional meetings were seen as valuable opportunities for U3As to exchange information/ideas and discuss problems/solutions, opening up communication lines between U3As in the region, and providing a sense of solidarity and belonging (Graph 3)

Most respondents were happy with the number of meetings per year (Graph 4) and supported offering attendance via Zoom. The use of a Round Up report at the meeting was also supported. While the discussions on the U3As' Round Up reports were considered a key element in the meetings, a number of respondents recommended the contributions from U3As during the discussions to be time-limited and focused. Some suggested the discussions could focus on a single topic or a theme arising from the completed reports. For example marketing your U3A, tutor recruitment, identifying joint workshops (Graph 5)

There was broad support for the current regional structure (Graph 6). Some U3As thought areas around mutual interest, metro/regional or U3A size (rather than geography) would be more beneficial and make the meetings more effective. It was also suggested platforms for such special interest groups could be run alongside the current structure, or 'break out rooms' during a Zoom meeting could be used.

Training and development

Member U3As were asked what training and development ideas would they like to include in regional meetings. The suggestions were then grouped into broad categories (Graph 7). Governance and succession planning eg. tutor/committee/membership recruitment were identified as the main training/development needs. Technology eg. Zoom, U-MAS, hybrid classes and marketing were also popular developmental areas

Recommendations:

MSM to work closely with smaller and/or more isolated U3As to:

- Identify what assistance (if any) they would like from Network/other U3As
- Offer other collaboration opportunities/platforms in addition to the regional meetings
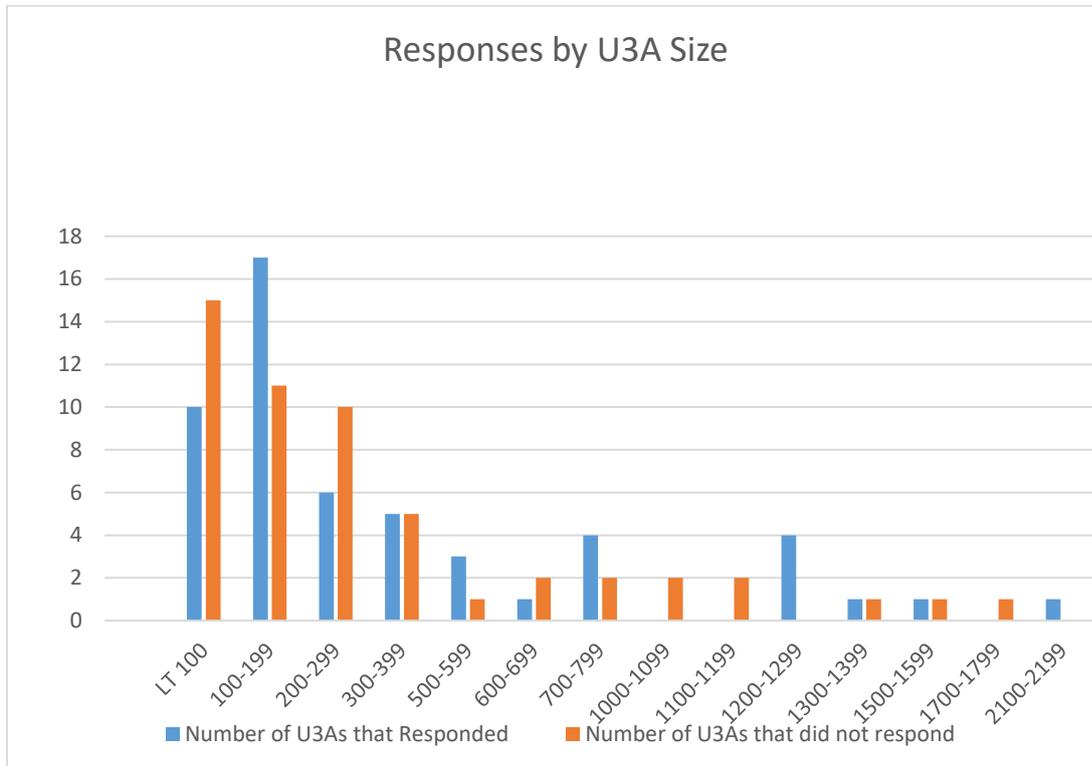
MSM to liaise with Regional Reps to:

- Develop a tailored agenda and Round Up template for each region, with the discussion topic a main focus
- From the completed templates, identify a region-specific discussion item for the meeting
- Completed reports to be circulated to U3As in the region and ensure the purpose of the reports is made clear, with a recommendation it is ideally used for discussion during Members' committee meetings
- Ensure meetings offer the option to attend via Zoom (with IT support from Network if needed)
- Encourage U3As to provide a contact email be shared across U3As within their region and across regions if agreed, to enable out-of-meeting discussions/collaborations

Network to:

- Run state-wide series of training sessions on governance/succession planning twice per year, around AGM time
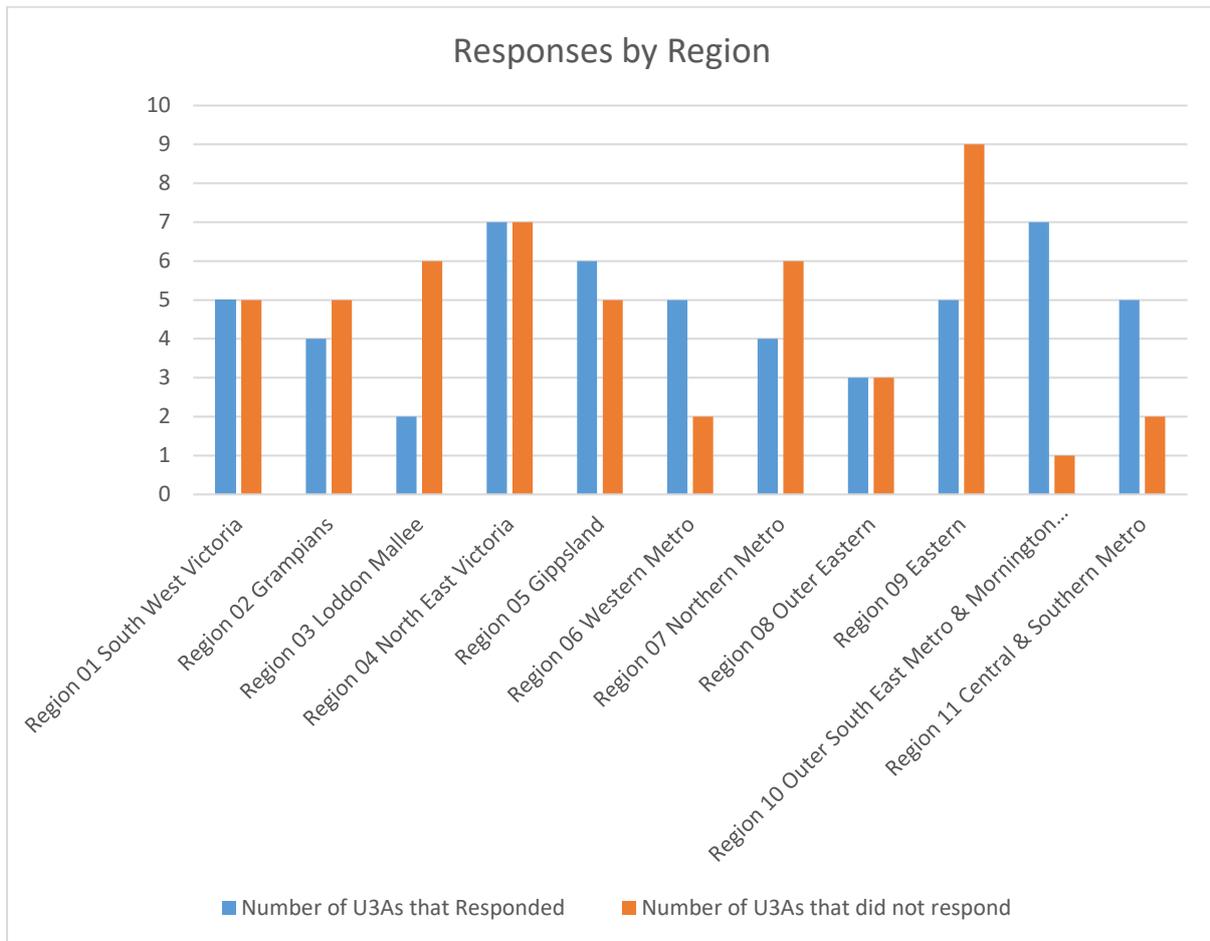- Develop series of drop in sessions for technology and marketing topics

Regional Survey

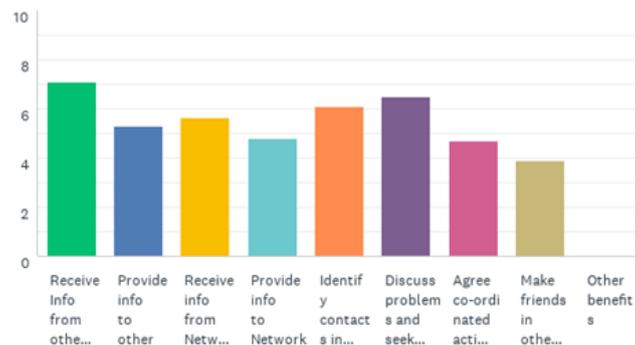**Graph No 1: Responses by U3A Size**

Responses by U3A Size

- 50 per cent of U3As with more than 1000 members responded – 7 out of 14
- 62 per cent of U3As with 500-999 members responded – 8 out of 13
- 42 per cent of U3As with 200-499 members responded – 11 out of 26
- 61 per cent of U3As with 100-199 members responded – 17 out of 28
- 40 per cent of U3As less than 100 members responded – 10 out of 25
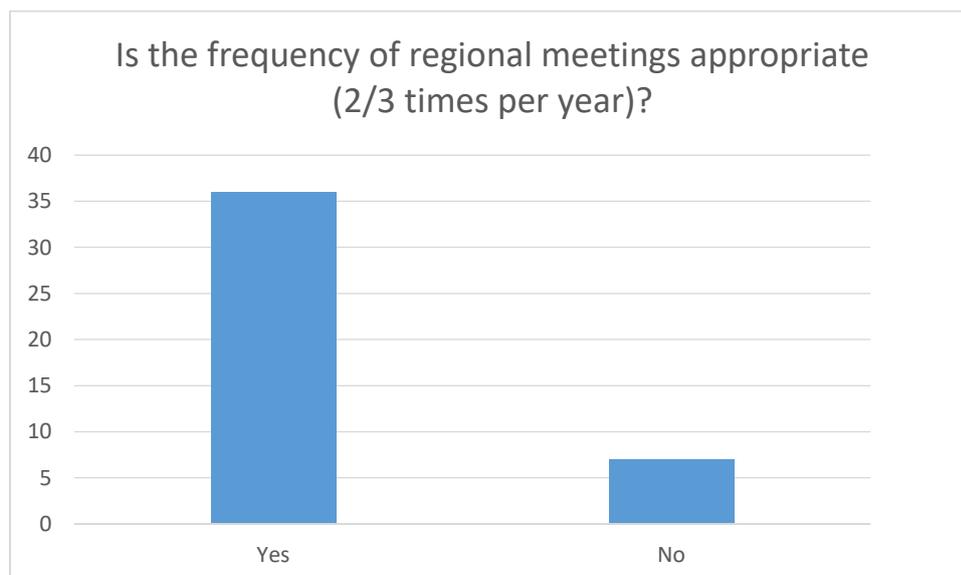
Graph No 2: Responses by Region

Responses by Region

Chart showing Number of U3As that Responded (blue) and Number of U3As that did not respond (orange) by region:

Region	Number of U3As that Responded	Number of U3As that did not respond
Region 01 South West Victoria	5	5
Region 02 Grampians	4	5
Region 03 Loddon Mallee	2	6
Region 04 North East Victoria	7	7
Region 05 Gippsland	6	5
Region 06 Western Metro	5	2
Region 07 Northern Metro	4	6
Region 08 Outer Eastern	3	3
Region 09 Eastern	5	9
Region 10 Outer South East Metro & Mornington...	7	1
Region 11 Central & Southern Metro	5	2

Graph No 3: Value in Regional Meetings

Q4 Value in regional meetings?Some of the benefits and goals of regional meetings are listed below. Please indicate the importance your U3A sees in these benefits by ranking 1 to 8. Enter 1 for the highest value, then 2 and continue up to 8. You must rank all 8 benefits, or else our system will fill in the empty rankings in the remaining ascending order.

1. Receive information from other U3As
2. Provide information to other U3As
3. Receive information from U3A Network
4. Provide information to U3A Network
5. Identify contacts in other U3As
6. Discuss problems/seek solutions from other U3As
7. Agree coordinated action with other U3As (eg marketing campaigns etc)
8. Make friends in other U3As
9. Other benefits

Graph No 4: - No of regional meetings

Is the frequency of regional meetings appropriate (2/3 times per year)?

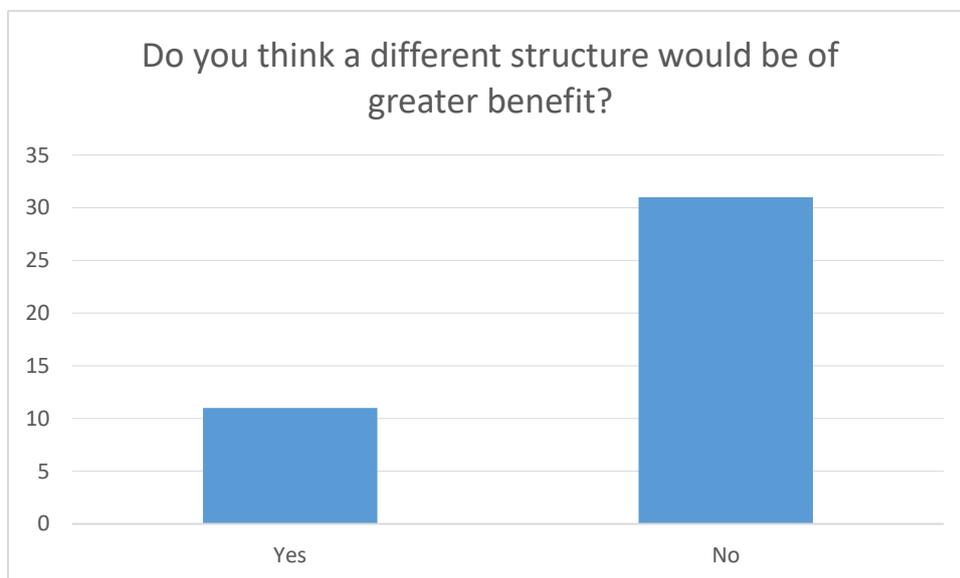**Graph No 5: Agenda items**

Q6 – Regional meetings are usually structured with the following agenda items. Please indicate the importance your U3A sees in these benefits by ranking 1 to 5. Enter 1 for the highest value, then 2 and continue through to 5. You must rank all 5 benefits, or else our system will fill in the empty rankings in the remaining ascending order.

1. Reports from delegates about their U3As activities and plans
2. Report from Network
3. Consideration of special topics – eg. Network Education plan, technology plan
4. Special speaker
5. Training session

Graph No 6: Regional structure

Graph No 7: Training and development needs

Training/Development Areas

Training Development Category	Category	No
Covid - risks, info currency, impact	CO	4
Governance	GO	12
Grants/Sponsorship	GR	5
Marketing	M	9
Recruiting (tutors/committee/members)	R	13
IT (Zoom, U-MAS, FB, Hybrid)	IT	12
Data & Security	DS	1
Tutor training	E	9
Strategic Planning	S	3

Note: Most respondents included more than one category

Tutor Training includes Hybrid Class demonstration; presenting courses; meeting skills; subject ideas;
Strategic Planning includes regional planning