



Findings from the U3A Croydon Members' Feedback Survey

January 2019

'It's terrific. Affordable, educational, good fun and the best social network out there. Thank you for all the hard work it takes to keep it going.'

'I feel if it wasn't for being a member of U3A for 22 years I wouldn't be as happy and healthy as I am today.'

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Key Findings

U3A Croydon is a valued community organisation for Maroondah's seniors population, keeping them physically and mentally active and socially connected. More could be achieved with the provision of suitable accommodation from local and state governments.

A reduction in social isolation and improved health and wellbeing are demonstrated benefits of members' participation in courses and activities at U3A Croydon. The benefits contribute to local, state and federal governments' Healthy Ageing agenda.

Over 93% of members were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their membership at U3A Croydon. Nearly 7% had mixed feelings or were 'dissatisfied'. None were 'very dissatisfied'.

Exercise type classes were the most popular, despite social benefits being most commonly reported by members. Members also appreciated the affordability and broad range of classes and activities offered.

There were many words of thanks for the tutors, the volunteers, and the Committee for their hard work and commitment to keep the organisation running.

Most critical comments were about venues. Comments described the old, dirty and poorly maintained buildings, unsuitable classroom space, and the lack of up to date facilities.

88% of respondents reported social benefits, 68% reported mental benefits, 54% reported physical benefits and 44% of respondents reported emotional benefits of their participation at U3A Croydon.

Respondents indicated they wanted a broader range of tech/computer course offerings, particularly those that allow members to bring their own devices and ask their own questions.

The long membership of older respondents, and the high number indicating they have gained social benefits from their membership, implies that they have relied on their involvement with U3A Croydon to provide a social network and stay active and healthy as they have aged.

The Survey Respondents

The survey was emailed to 626 members and mailed to 154 members without email addresses. There was a 40.3% response rate.

Around 80% of respondents were female and 20% male. It is likely that a third of U3A Croydon members live alone.

Most were between the ages of 61 and 80, with 45% between 71 and 80. 15% were aged 81 or over.

Almost 57%, or just over a half of the respondents, have been a member for 5 years or less, and about 43%, or just under half, have been a member for 5 years or longer.

Our Most Senior Members:

A sub-group of survey respondents (35 people) were aged 81 or over and did not have an email address. They are referred to as the Most Senior Members.

The Most Senior Members were the large majority (75%) of all members aged 81 and over.

Half of the Most Senior Members (49%) had been a member of U3A Croydon for 10 years or longer compared to 18% of the total number of respondents.

Half of the Most Senior Members took exercise classes. A higher percentage of Most Senior Members took games and craft classes than the percentage for all respondents.

Many had modified their course choice over the years to suit their changing interests and abilities.

Many have formed enduring support networks and provide friendship and companionship to others, with whom they share interests and skills.

U3A Croydon and its Mission

'It's a great organisation which assists in the mental and physical wellbeing of elderly citizens. It should get more support from all levels of government.'

U3A Croydon is one of three U3As (University of the Third Age) in the City of Maroondah, located in the outer metropolitan region of Melbourne. The U3A 'movement' provides courses and activities for retired and semi-retired people. U3A Croydon was established in 1992 and since that time has steadily increased its membership to over 1,000 members in the last term of 2018. It is run entirely by volunteers and is funded by membership fees and the occasional grant.

U3A Croydon's Mission Statement is:

"to provide people in their third age of life with opportunities to stay physically, mentally and socially active. We are run by volunteers who support our members to learn, teach, share, have fun and stay fit in a relaxed, friendly and stimulating environment."

U3A Croydon's Mission Statement is aligned to the Victorian government's Healthy Ageing agenda to assist seniors to remain physically, mentally and socially active. The Victorian Government's *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019* states that:

"Healthy ageing enables older Victorians to remain active and to participate in and contribute socially and economically to their community....

Participating in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities with family or in the community enables older adults to continue to use their skills, enjoy respect and esteem, and to maintain or establish supportive and caring relationships. This in turn contributes to better health and wellbeing."

The Victorian Government's report *Health and wellbeing status of Victoria: Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2015–2019 companion document* indicates that older Victorians are at greater risk of social isolation than other adults.

The findings of the Members' Feedback Survey enable U3A Croydon to assess whether it is achieving its mission and supporting the Healthy Ageing goals of government.

It is also timely that U3A Croydon reviews the services it delivers and attunes them to the needs of current members, as well as the growing population of older citizens in the Maroondah area.

Maroondah's Ageing Population

In 2016:*

Maroondah's population of over 60s was 23,711, which is 21.5% of Maroondah's total population.

Maroondah's population of aged 60+ is above the metropolitan average.

By 2020:**

Maroondah's population is increasing and by 2020, 40% of Maroondah's population will be aged 45+.

The greatest increase (25.7%) will occur in the population of retirement age.

The largest increase in the population of retirement age is forecast to be in the 70-74 age group.

*Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2016*

**Maroondah City Council's *Active and Healthy Ageing Initiative: Towards an Age-Friendly Maroondah 2015-2020*.

The Survey

In October 2018, U3A Croydon applied for, and was awarded, a grant of \$3,000 to implement a Members' Feedback Survey under the ACFE2 (Australian Council of Further Education) funding stream, administered by the U3A Network, Victoria.

From 30th November to 14th December 2018, U3A Croydon invited members to 'have their say' by completing the Members' Feedback Survey. Questions elicited information about their experience of being a member of U3A Croydon, and any suggestions they had to improve their experience. We also asked questions that would determine what benefits, if any, members gained from their participation in our courses and activities.

The survey was distributed via email to an on-line link to Google Forms to 626 members, and via the postal service to 154 members without emails with a postage paid return envelope. There was a two-week window, from 30th November to 14th December, for members to complete and return the survey.¹

From a total of 780 members who received the survey, 227 on-line responses and 88 mailed responses, a total of 315 responses, were received. This is a 40.3% response rate, which is a favourably high result. The respondents without email addresses tended to be older and to have been a member of U3A Croydon longer than those who completed an on-line survey. The findings from the survey are outlined in the following pages.

ABOUT THE PIE CHARTS, GRAPHS, SCALES AND TABLES

In this report, the questions that were asked in the survey are in blue text above the pie charts, graphs and scales, which show statistical findings.

Beneath the question is the number of responses, or number of people who answered the question (eg. 315). Where respondents could choose more than one answer, this is noted next to the number of responses.

The findings are displayed as either **pie charts, graphs or scales**.

Beneath them is a **table** that shows the statistical information in a different format. The table heading also shows in brackets the total number of people who responded to that question.

Some questions in the survey 'required' an answer. This means they have a response rate of the total number of people who responded to the survey, which is 315.

Some questions were optional. Their response rate will be less than 315 depending on how many people responded to the question.

For some questions you could only chose one answer. These are displayed as pie charts or a scale where you chose from 1 to 5. Percentages when added together total 100%.

For some questions you could chose more than one answer. Each answer option is a percentage of the total number of respondents. Percentages will not total 100% when added together.

¹ See Attachment 1 at the back of this report for further details on the survey's methodology.
U3A Croydon's Members' Feedback Survey, January 2019

The Respondents

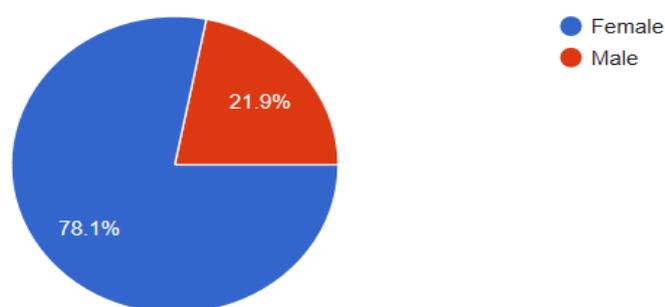
'All activities have a major benefit of keeping our age group connected to society.'

'I have met such a wide variety of people with such interesting life stories and I now know that age is only a number!'

The following three questions give basic demographic information about the respondents, followed by a question about their length of membership and a general question about how satisfied respondents are with their membership overall.

Can you tell us your gender?

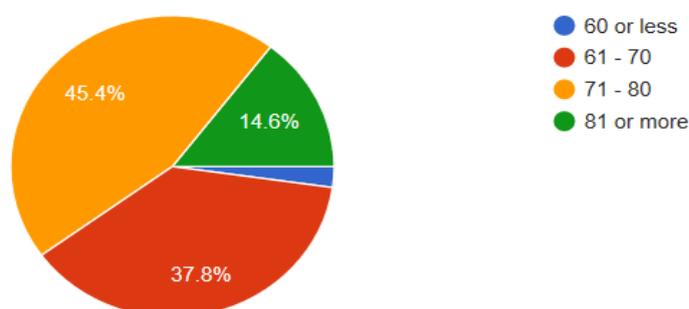
315 responses



Number of responses (315)		Gender
246	78.1%	Female
69	21.9%	Male

What is your age group?

315 responses



Number of responses (315)		Age
7	2.2%	60 or less
119	37.8%	Between 61 and 70
143	45.4%	Between 71 and 80
46	14.6%	Aged 81 or over

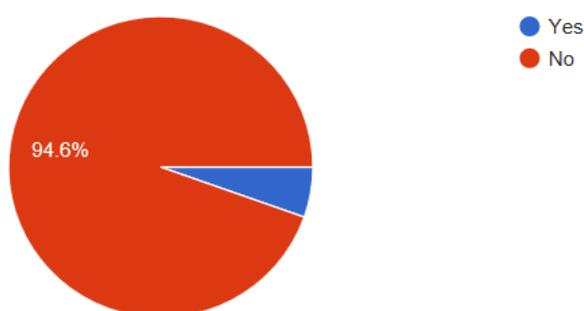
Just under eight out of ten respondents were female and just over two out of ten were male.

The U3A Network Victoria's 2018 Member Profile Survey found that 31% of their respondents live alone. This figure is likely to be similar for U3A Croydon members who share a similar age and gender profile as in the Network's Member Profile Survey.

Almost four out of ten respondents to U3A Croydon's Survey were aged between 61-70 and almost five out of ten were from 71- 80. Nearly 15% were aged 81 or over.

Do you use public transport to get to any of your U3A Croydon courses or activities?

315 responses

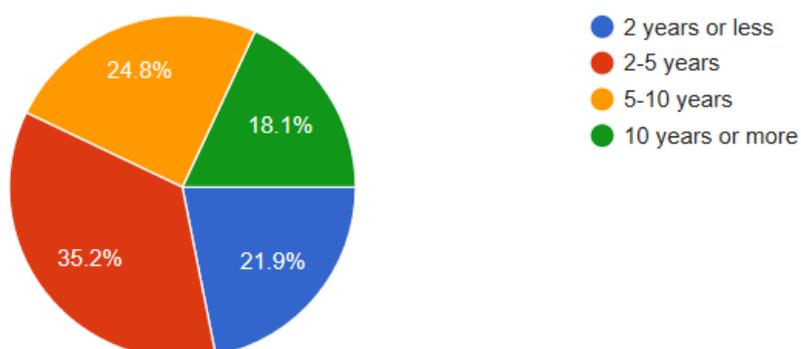


Number of responses (315)		Use public transport to get to courses?
17	5.4%	Yes
298	94.6%	No

U3A Croydon uses eight community facilities which are scattered around the Croydon area. There is a half a kilometre walk from the train station to the most accessible facilities.

How long have you been a member of U3A Croydon?

315 responses



Number of responses (315)		Length of time a member
69	21.9%	2 years or less
111	35.2%	From 2-5 years
78	24.8%	From 5-10 years
57	18.1%	10 years or more

Given the large number of 'no email' respondents who tended to be older and to have been a member of U3A Croydon for longer, the length of membership indicated is probably slightly longer than the average for the general membership. Still, about 45%, getting close to half, of all respondents have been members for five years or longer.

In summary

Around 80% of respondents are female and 20% male. Most are between the ages of 61 and 80, with 45% between 71 and 80. It is likely that a third of members live alone.

Only 5% use public transport to get to courses and activities.

Almost 57%, or just over a half, have been a member for 5 years or less, and about 43%, or just under half, have been a member for 5 years or longer.

ABOUT THE COMMENTS AND THE QUOTES

The survey gave people the opportunity to make comments about their views on different things. There were five questions inviting comments. We received 403 comments.

In this report, the comments follow the statistical information in each section.

We have accurately given the number of responses to each comment question. The number is given next to the reference to that question in the text.

We then sorted the comments into categories such as: suggestions; compliments; criticisms. These categories were broken down further into sub-categories.

It is not possible with exact accuracy to determine how many people gave comments about a specific sub-category because sometimes comments contained mixed or complex information.

In this report we have estimated the number of comments in the sub-categories to give you a general idea of members' views about certain aspects of their membership.

We have included some quotes from members that capture the range of members' feelings and attitudes about their experiences of being a member of U3A Croydon.

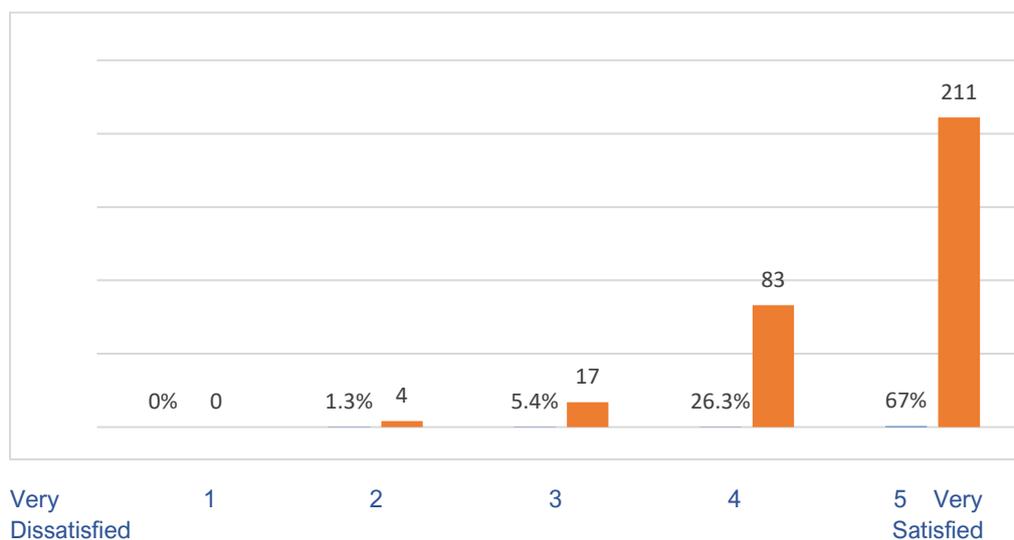
Negative comments were mostly about venues and accommodation. Suggestions, negative comments, complaints and criticisms will be referred to the Committee for review and action where necessary.

Members' Satisfaction with U3A Croydon

'Just to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers who do a tremendous job. Croydon U3A is a well organised, and friendly organisation that offers a great range of activities, and we are most appreciative of their efforts.'

How satisfied are you, overall, with your membership at U3A Croydon?

315 responses



Number of responses (315)		How satisfied are you with your membership at U3A?
211	67%	Very satisfied
83	26.3%	Satisfied
17	5.4%	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4	1.3%	Dissatisfied
0	0%	Very dissatisfied

It is encouraging to find that 93% of respondents are 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their membership at U3A Croydon. A further 17 had mixed feelings, four were 'dissatisfied' and none were 'very dissatisfied'.

This rating comes at a time when, without notice to U3A, a large parking area was shut down and construction commenced next to the most used U3A venue. Responses from the 'comments' questions indicate a high degree of dissatisfaction with the situation, which has most likely had a negative impact on respondents' satisfaction ratings.

Comments about respondents' membership at U3A Croydon

Members were invited to 'list any suggestions they may have to improve their experience of being a member of U3A Croydon'. 87 members chose to comment on this question. Respondents were also asked for any 'other comments' they may have at the end of the survey and 99 members added a broad range of comments.

There were about 40 non-venue-related suggestions or complaints from these two questions, which will be fed back to the Committee for consideration. There were also

U3A Croydon's Members' Feedback Survey, January 2019

questions raised by respondents about certain decisions that have been made at a Committee or administrative level.

Around ten members complained about what they perceived to be the 'controlling', 'rigid' or 'intimidating' nature of the Committee or how the office was run. But some comments were positive:

'I have the pleasure of occasionally being able to help out in the office and I'm really impressed with how things are run and how there are continual reviews and improvements.'

A list of all questions raised by respondents will be assembled into a Question and Answer sheet and published in the newsletter and posted on our website.

The two questions about 'suggestions' and 'other comments' also attracted about 60 positive responses, thanking the volunteers and the Committee for their efforts and praising the organisation for what it delivers for its members:

'I would like to thank collectively all the fabulous people who make it happen. Everyone contributes to a degree, but the core that work so hard and so selflessly, you are why this brilliant organisation is such an ongoing and growing success. Thankyou.'

'I think it is a great organisation and would like to thank those members who give their time voluntarily to the smooth running of it.'

'Thank you everyone. I have enjoyed my first year ever as a U3A member and am glad it is at Croydon U3A.'

'Everyone does a great job at running the U3A. It is a huge commitment.'

'Just a huge "thanks" to the Committee and everyone at U3A - for all their work, the activities and friendships in all areas of the organisation.'

'Impressed with this organisation and all who serve to make it work. Thank you.'

'I am no longer able to contribute but I really appreciate the work done by the many volunteers.'

'Keep up the good work, we need each other.'

Comments about venues

U3A Croydon does not have its own premises, or the use of a purpose-built facility, as some U3As do, but uses eight venues around the Croydon area. The organisation rents five venues from the Council including an office space and four classroom venues, it rents two venues from two different Scouts branches, and uses one room provided by Swinburne University which has a campus close to the U3A office. These rooms are of varying quality and suitability. Many are old and lack up to date facilities. Many do not provide storage facilities. Some of the rooms we rent are shared with athletic clubs and do not provide ideal classroom space.

Approximately 60 complaints were received about venues. Some of the comments and complaints were a reiteration of a longstanding grievance: the lack of a 'home for U3A U3A Croydon's Members' Feedback Survey, January 2019

Croydon. Other comments centred on a lack of centralised venues, a lack a purpose-built, modern building and a lack of adequate facilities:

'It would be great to have our own building to call home like so many other places.'

'A more centralised main building would have a better feel. Maroondah Council would need encouragement.'

'Just please give teachers a proper venue to teach their classes. Some that we use now are not suitable at all.'

Several are old, run down:

'Some rooms don't have proper toilets and the rooms are not that clean. Lighting in some rooms is poor.'

'Some building require repair; some classrooms and furniture are grubby and need immediate attention.'

They also lack facilities such as:

'Good WiFi, decent whiteboard and projection facilities, student access to internet, TV, DVD, UTube, etc.'

Over many years, members of the Committee have urged the Council to allocate more suitable accommodation to U3A Croydon, but it seems that the needs of our organisation are not a priority for them. As one respondent said:

'I find it disappointing that the local council don't offer more assistance in terms of venues or even in terms of budgeting to gradually build or renovate some premises for U3A use as there are so many people involved in courses and they need to cater for this age group a bit more in their annual budget.'

The current Committee has begun to look further afield to source accommodation, which has become urgent since the redevelopment next to the Scout Hall has commenced.

The redevelopment is located immediately next to the Kent Avenue Scout Hall which has three rooms that accommodate 27 classes. Parking was closed off without notice at the beginning of the last term of 2018 and construction commenced causing a high level of distress and dissatisfaction by members who use the rooms in this building.

It is not surprising that the greatest number of venue complaints were about the Kent Avenue Scout Hall. The Scout Hall was old and dilapidated before being afflicted with noise and dust from the construction site next door, where previously members were able to park their cars.

A litany of detailed complaints were received about the dire conditions tutors and members now have to tolerate. The Committee has been aware of the exacerbated problems and heightened tensions regarding this venue and has been negotiating with another venue provider to relocate the classes most affected by the redevelopment. We hope to have a resolution soon after of the first term of 2019 begins. One comment sums up members' feelings about this venue:

'Give away the old Scout Hall.'

In summary

Most respondents are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their membership at U3A Croydon. Many members thanked, or praised, the Committee, the tutors and the volunteers for the contribution they make to keep the organisation running and providing an important social outlet for senior members.

About 7% had mixed feelings or were 'dissatisfied' with their membership, and none were 'very dissatisfied'.

By far, the most criticisms and complaints were about the inadequate venues, and this dissatisfaction has peaked over the last term of 2018 due to construction works and reduced parking close to our most used venue.

U3A Croydon's members would greatly benefit from any efforts by Maroondah Council to provide more suitable venues for the many courses and activities. As offers have not been forthcoming, U3A Croydon continues to seek out suitable venues in the local community.

Participation in Courses and Activities

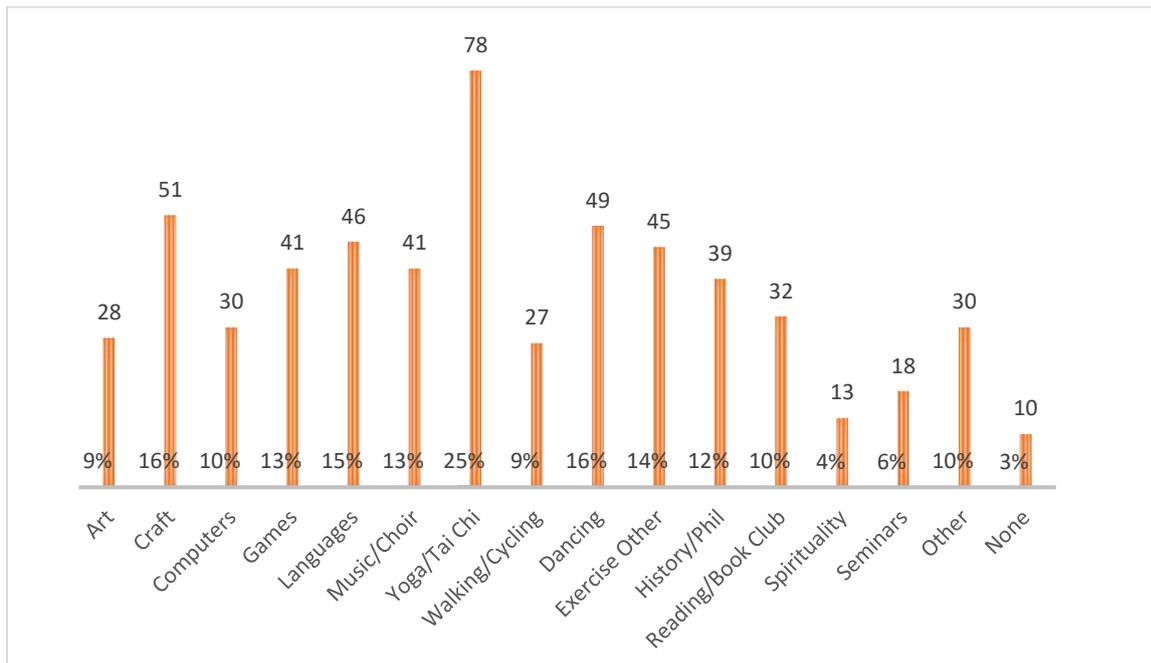
‘Your courses have given me company and interests, physical, and mental stimulation, opportunity and enjoyment in things I like to do.’

‘The range of courses offered is varied and extensive – and such a reasonable price!’

U3A Croydon offers around 100 courses and activities each week. For an annual fee currently at \$50 members can attend up to six courses or activities in each term.

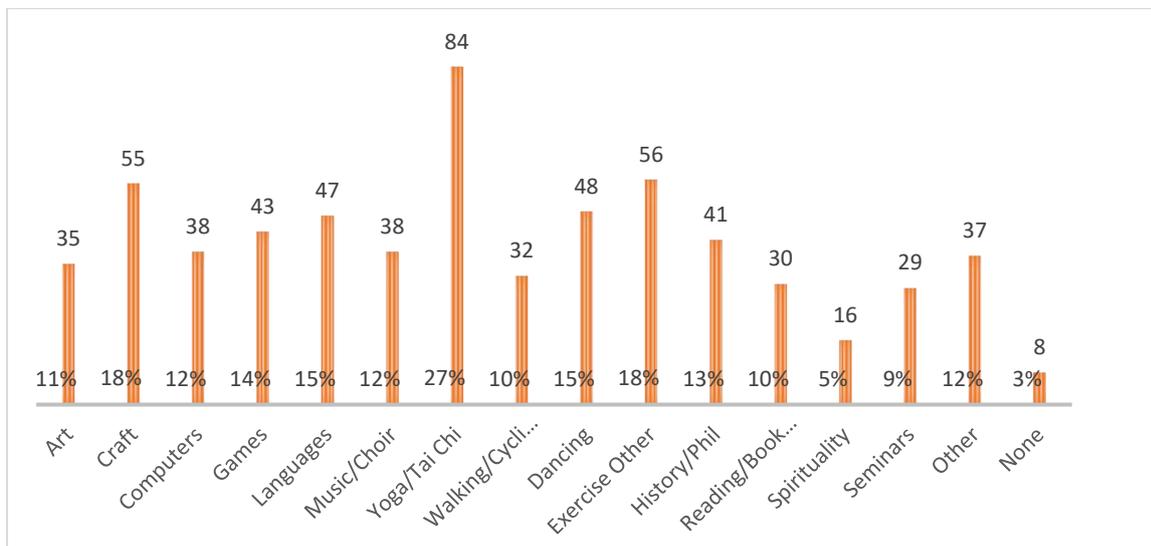
What type of courses/activities did you participate in this year?

315 responses, respondents could choose more than one answer



What type of courses/activities do you expect to participate in next year?

315 responses, respondents could choose more than one answer



The two graphs above show course preferences for 2018 and 2019. There is a slight movement in some courses and activities from one year to the next, but generally respondents' preferences are consistent, suggesting they prefer to join the same group as in the previous year.

Exercise type classes are the most popular courses offered at U3A Croydon, particularly yoga and tai chi, as well as dancing classes, the majority of which are line dancing classes. The 'exercise other' offerings include a range of unique classes such as Feldenkrais, table tennis and gentle exercise classes.

Many exercise classes, including yoga and tai chi, fill up as soon as they are offered and have waiting lists. The main challenge in expanding the offerings of these types of classes is finding suitable accommodation. This year we have restricted participation in some classes to one of each type per person to enable more members to be able to participate in them.

Walking and cycling classes are more strenuous and attract fitter members. A *Rediscovering Melbourne* course which combines walking and sight-seeing is popular and less physically demanding than the walking and cycling group activities.

Art classes are popular and tend to attract the same students each year. Again, the numbers are limited by access to the appropriate venue and some art classes have wait lists.

Craft and games classes continue to be popular, and suit many of our older members who are not as mobile as they once were. Craft and games courses are often valued for the social aspect of the course, as well as the content.

Music and choir classes are in high demand and the numbers able to attend these classes is limited by the accommodation that can be found to house these large groups of people and their instruments.

Humanities classes continue to be popular, such as history, philosophy, current affairs and language classes, as well as book clubs.

Seminars were attended by 18 members in 2018 and more would like to attend them next year. Seminars cover topical issues such as energy prices, caring for people with dementia, etc. and give people an opportunity to attend a one-off session instead of a full term.

The eight 'none' responses to course participation in 2018 and 2019 includes members such as 'life' or 'honorary' members who may not participate in classes, people who volunteer but do not take a class and tutors who do not have to enrol in their own class and chose not to take another class.

Comments about courses

Members were invited to comment on any suggestions they may have to improve the courses and activities they participate in, and any other courses and activities they would like to see. There were 65 responses to suggested improvements. Most of the 'suggestions' were actually positive comments about the courses and activities they attend.

There were about 20 suggestions and criticisms about courses and activities. Those that convey dissatisfaction relate to wait lists for people to get into classes, restrictions for enrolling in some classes, complaints by members who had outlaid money on equipment or books for the classes that they did not get into the following year, and a desire for classes to

be held more often or on different days. There were also a small number of complaints about individual classes and how they were run.

66 respondents suggested new courses or activities. Many of the suggestions relate to a specific interest and would depend on a tutor being able to lead such a course, and an appropriate room being available, for it to run.

Other suggestions had more general appeal and consideration may be given to advertising for a tutor in the newsletter and on the website to lead a group in that area. Some members suggested U3A Croydon offer 'taster' classes so people could find out about the class before they commit, others suggested running a holiday program over the term break, which occurs in other U3As, because:

'Many of us do not spend the school holidays looking after grandkids.'

Comments about the tutors and volunteers

About 80 tutors give their time leading the 100 courses and activities, and many other volunteers keep the organisation running. There were about 50 positive comments about and 'thank you's for the tutors and volunteers, without whom there would be no U3A.

Members talked about how much they had learned from their tutors, how much they appreciated their friendship and contribution, and the difference participation in their courses and activities had made to their lives. There were many lovely comments about specific tutors and their classes which we have not reproduced here for privacy reasons.

There were also many general comments, some of which we have listed below:

'Participating in a friendly environment with the opportunity to contribute as well as learn. The course has re-ignited my enthusiasm and love for music - playing and singing - something which had been stuck in the back-burner for years, due to work and family responsibilities.'

'I really appreciate the efforts of the volunteers, especially the tutors, who selflessly provide stimulating activities throughout the year.'

'Have learnt much more than I expected and enjoyed sharing the learning with the other class members. We are a very supportive group and feel supported by U3A. Thank you.'

'I feel that everyone involved does their utmost to provide members with a wide range of subjects.'

'Thanks to the committee for all their hard work and to all the wonderful tutors who give us their time week after week. And for their friendship.'

'Having your wonderful tutors, who teach voluntarily, passing on their skills to us, their students, is a commendable achievement, I thank them, and you the organisers for that.'

'Many thanks to all the volunteers that have made it possible. You are the best!'

In summary

Exercise type classes were by far the most popular despite the social benefits being most commonly reported by respondents, with crafts, games and humanities type subjects such as history, philosophy and literature/book clubs also popular along with music/choir.

The findings show that members appreciate the broad range of courses and activities offered, which is particularly important to members who need to adjust their choices to suit their changing physical abilities and family circumstances as they age.

Many of the popular courses and activities, particularly gentle exercise classes such as yoga and tai chi, have wait lists and the lack of appropriate accommodation limits the organisation's ability to cater for the full demand for these important classes.

Many respondents thanked the tutors for their generosity in sharing their skills and knowledge, recognising how much the tutors contribute to their overall wellbeing. Their acknowledgement of the care and support they receive reinforces the Healthy Ageing benefits noted by the Victorian Government.

U3A Croydon is confident that it could provide more courses and activities and expand its membership numbers of older people in the local area if more suitable accommodation and facilities were available. This would enable U3A Croydon to continue to meet the demand for courses and activities from the expanding ageing population in the Maroondah area.

Technical/Computer Courses and Activities

'I enjoyed the computer classes and learned a few tricks on the keyboard.'

'Full credit to [tutor] for his help and patience with basic computer class. Will enrol in the next class when I can.'

U3A Croydon is in the process of reviewing the technical/computer courses it delivers to members. We have a computer lab with nine desktop computers, but they are old and need replacing. Courses that are currently offered include introductory courses at three different levels, and courses on Microsoft Office programs and Windows 10.

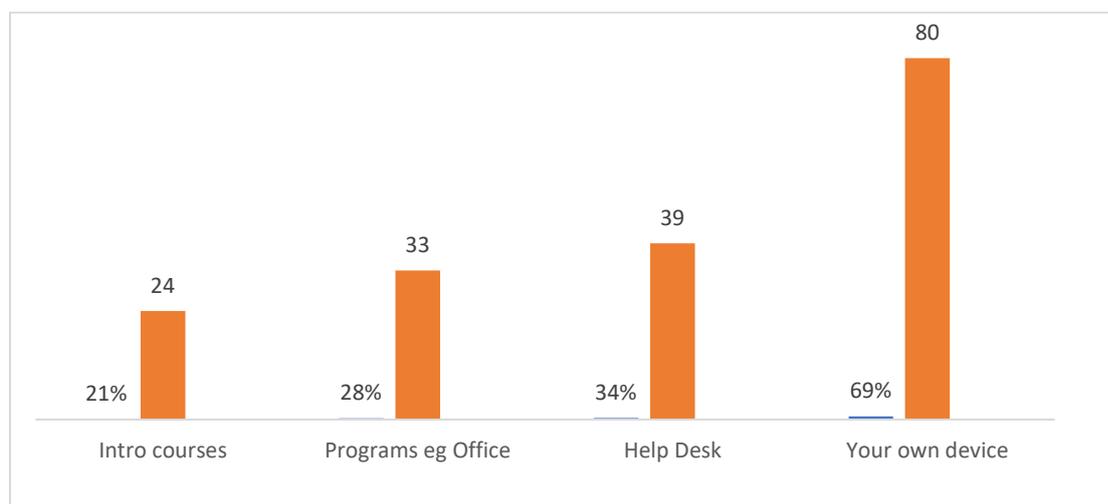
Except for a tablet course, U3A Croydon does not currently offer courses where members can bring their own devices and learn how to use them. Nor do we currently offer a 'help desk' type experience.

An important focus of the survey was to determine what sort of tech/computer classes our members would prefer, and what sort of device they would prefer to learn on. In the two questions in the previous section about course and activity participation, which were required questions, 30 respondents said they had taken a computer course in 2018 and 38 intended to do so in the future.

Compare this with the two optional questions below that offer more learning options, with 116 respondents who expressed an interest in more diverse offerings, and 130 respondents who would prefer to bring their own device to a tech/computer class.

If you are interested in Tech/Computer activities, what is your main area of interest?

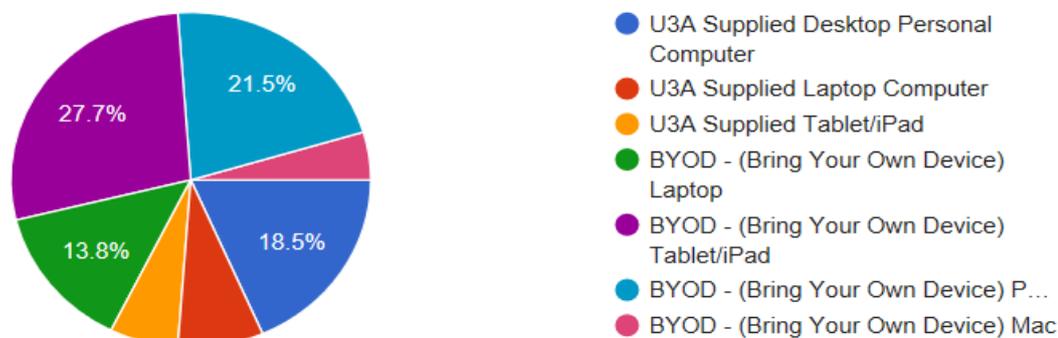
116 responses, respondents could choose more than one answer



Number of responses (116)		Main area of interest
24	21%	Introductory courses
33	28%	Programs -MS Office; Windows 10
39	34%	Help Desk type classes
80	69%	How to use your own device

If you are interested in Tech/Computer activities, what device would you prefer to use?

130 responses



Number of responses (130)		Device preference
24	18.5%	U3A supplied desktop computer
10	7.7%	U3A supplied laptop computer
8	6.2%	U3A supplied tablet or iPad
18	13.8%	Bring your own laptop
36	27.7%	Bring your own tablet or iPad
28	21.5%	Bring your own phone
6	4.6%	Bring your own Mac

42 respondents or 32% would prefer to use a U3A supplied device
88 respondents or 68% would prefer to bring their own device

The significant increase in responses with an expanded list of preferences that include several 'bring your own device' options reinforces the need to update what we are currently doing and expand our course offerings, and the way they are delivered, to meet the needs of members.

The findings show that members would benefit from being able to bring their mobile phones and laptops to a classroom type setting and learn how to use them.

We are currently establishing new learning opportunities using the *Be Connected* basic learning program that has been promoted by the U3A Network. We have received a *Be Connected* grant to install Wi-Fi facilities in one of our classrooms. This will enable members to bring their own devices and ask questions of tutors about how to use them.

In summary

The figures above show a gap in the number of members currently participating in computer/tech courses and those who would in the future if there were more choices and more flexibility in the way learning opportunities were delivered.

It is timely that U3A Croydon update the technical/computer services it offers to meet the changing needs of its members by providing a broader range of course offerings, particularly those that allow members to bring their own devices and ask their own questions.

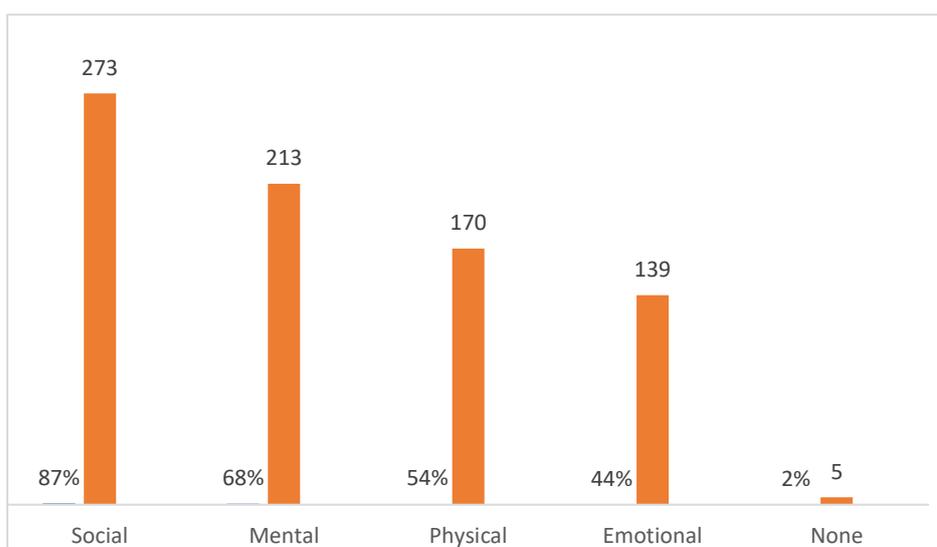
The Benefits of Being a Member of U3A

'U3A Croydon is of vital importance to me and my wellbeing.'

'[The benefits are] mostly becoming socially active while participating in class activities to prevent from loneliness and isolation, which are most detrimental to old aged health and well-being.'

What benefits, if any, have you gained from your membership at U3A Croydon?

315 responses, respondents could choose more than one answer



Number of responses (315)		Benefits to being a member
273	87%	Social - Friendships, social interaction, companionship
213	68%	Mental - Knowledge, skills, mental stimulation
170	54%	Physical - Health, fitness, being more active
139	44%	Emotional - Wellbeing, confidence, contributing, valued
5	2%	None

Comments about benefits

Respondents were invited to comment further on any benefits the courses and activities they participate in have had on their life, and 86 members chose to do so.

The above categories of social, mental and physical wellbeing broadly align with the Healthy Ageing agenda of government and the survey sought to draw comments about these areas.

The category 'emotional' was added to include general 'wellbeing', 'confidence', 'making a contribution' and 'feeling valued'. This category was added to stimulate further thought and comments about the benefits experienced for members. Comments about 'emotional' benefits are included in the other three categories summarised below.

The social benefits

The social aspect of being a member of U3A Croydon was the most reported benefit, mentioned by 87% of respondents. This is an interesting finding given that exercise type classes were by far the most popular choice among members.

The social benefits were most important to members, particularly as their lifestyle changes and they transition from work to retirement, when they or their partner face an illness or injury, or they must adjust to other major events in their lives. Some respondents commented on how their membership had reduced isolation for them. This is an important benefit given the number of members who are likely to live alone.

In the comments below the social benefits mentioned include helping members to feel connected to their local community, to the community of members in their classes, or more broadly to the organisation. They also mentioned making new friends and receiving social support, as well as helping them adjust to changing circumstances in their lives. The affordability of U3A Croydon membership was also valued, given many members have reduced financial circumstances after retirement.

Connection to community

'I feel part of the community since moving into Croydon.'

'[I have] a wonderful sense of belonging to the U3A community.'

'As a single person, U3A has helped me greatly in engaging socially with others and in providing mentally engaging activities in my local area.'

'The craft classes are needed for the social companionship of the elderly who cannot participate in a lot of the other courses. Without these classes they would be lonely and easily depressed.'

'It's great to be able to do things that I might not necessarily be able to afford to pay to do.'

Making new friends

Many members mentioned the value to them of making new friends and feeling supported:

'I have made many good friends through U3A and I am grateful to be a member.'

'I have made wonderful friends and being a member has broadened my outlook.'

'My partner has learned to dance which enhances our social life.'

'I enjoy the social interaction with some great people. In the courses I attend, I find that the participants look out for each other. They care about others.'

'I have made some wonderful friends. I feel very supported by the tutors and the people I have met. I feel I am improving myself.'

'Being able to meet a new circle of friends with the same interest is invaluable.'

Retirement

Another benefit mentioned by some members was the help to 'find their feet' after retirement, which for some included a relocation to the Croydon area:

'When I retired from full-time work I had no friends in the local area. U3A has brought me in contact with so many people from Croydon and the surrounding region, that now I have formed friendships with, that I feel blessed.'

'It is good meeting new people in similar circumstances to you and your situation and understanding the difference between now and when you were in the work environment.'

'You saved my life after retirement! I get up each day and look forward to study and participating in the courses you offer. Thanks heaps!'

'Provided a friendship base in retirement when you leave the friendships you had at work behind.'

Adjustment to new circumstances

'I have just returned to the area after a long 'tree change' and have found myself a little lost on my return. Just enrolling for courses next year has improved my outlook. Thankyou.'

'Very happy with the help and emotional support supplied to my friends who lost their partners from people who are at U3A.'

'Fantastic organisation, great people. Joining U3A for me was a lifestyle change.'

Feeling valued and making a contribution

Participation in U3A Croydon enables people to feel valued and contribute to society:

'Met lots of folk. Knowing what I do is appreciated. Reinforcement that retired people can still contribute and learn. Positive experience.'

'I had a long illness and was lonely for years. Now, I tutor two courses and have a network of friends to share other activities with. Love U3A. Thank you.'

'Sharing my knowledge and getting their input with other like-minded people.'

The mental benefits

A number of members mentioned the benefits of remaining mentally stimulated, not just to keep their mind active, but to give their life meaning through continually learning and expanding their perspective:

'Participating and hearing and learning more about people gives life a true meaning.'

'A joy to be in company interested in many and varied matters. Enthusiasm need not dissipate with age!'

'Every week brings new ideas, challenges my prejudices and expands my mind.'

'Makes me research topics more for the course.'

'Hopefully continues to keep the 'grey matter' ticking over.'

'Widens your horizon on all aspects of living.'

The physical benefits

Fewer people mentioned the physical benefits of being a member of U3A Croydon, despite the higher number of people taking classes or activities that provide physical benefits. For those who mentioned physical benefits, their comments were often mentioned in the context of broader social benefits:

'As physical wellness changes you can change your classes of interest to accommodate this.'

'I always feel good when I come away from classes.'

'These activities really contribute to my health and happiness by giving me social outlets with people who have similar interests.'

'Expanded my friends, fitness and general well-being.'

In summary

A reduction in social isolation and improved health and wellbeing are demonstrated benefits of members' participation in U3A Croydon. These benefits add support to the local, state and federal government's Healthy Ageing agenda.

U3A Croydon is an important organisation that contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of the Maroondah population, keeping them physically and mentally active and social connected.

The organisation could receive more recognition for the significant contribution it makes to the health of the local community and receive more support from local and state government to expand its services to extend the benefits to more senior citizens in the area.

U3A Croydon's Most Senior Members

'I believe U3A is a great organisation. I have made some great friends. Now I am older things change. Bushwalking and exercise classes held me in good stead. Now I hope to continue with [tai chi] exercise.'

Of the 315 responses to the survey, we received responses from 88 members without email addresses who were mailed a survey and a stamped, addressed envelope to return the survey to us in.

The table below shows the stark differences in age between the no-email sample and the total number of all 315 respondents.

Age of no-email respondents compared with all respondents:

Number of all responses (315)		Number of no-email responses (88)		Age
7	2%	1	1%	60 or less
119	38%	13	15%	Between 61 and 70
143	45%	39	44%	Between 71 and 80
46	15%	35	40%	Aged 81 or over

The table shows the much greater number of older members in the no-email sample than for 'all respondents', with 75%, or three quarters of members aged 81 and over being in the no-email group.

Of the 88 mailed responses, 35 of the respondents were 81 years of age or older.

This is 75% of the total number of 46 respondents aged 81 and over.

We can make an assumption that the respondents without email addresses do not have one because their ability and desire to use email technology is limited.

This assumption is voiced by one no-email member who didn't give her age range, but has been a member for ten years or more, who said:

'U3A is a great organisation. It's a pity the Croydon Committee is so engrossed with computers. Some people don't, and never will, own one.'

We have taken a closer look at this important group of 35 members who do not have email addresses and who are 81 years or older.

They are referred to herein as the 'Most Senior Members'. This group of respondents can tell us a lot about how we best meet the needs of our membership as we age.

Features of the Most Senior Members

The gender breakdown for the Most Senior Members is about the same as the total sample of respondents.

- 27 Most Senior Members, or 77% are female
- 8 Most Senior Members, or 23% are male

It is likely that at least a third of the Most Senior Members, probably more, live alone.

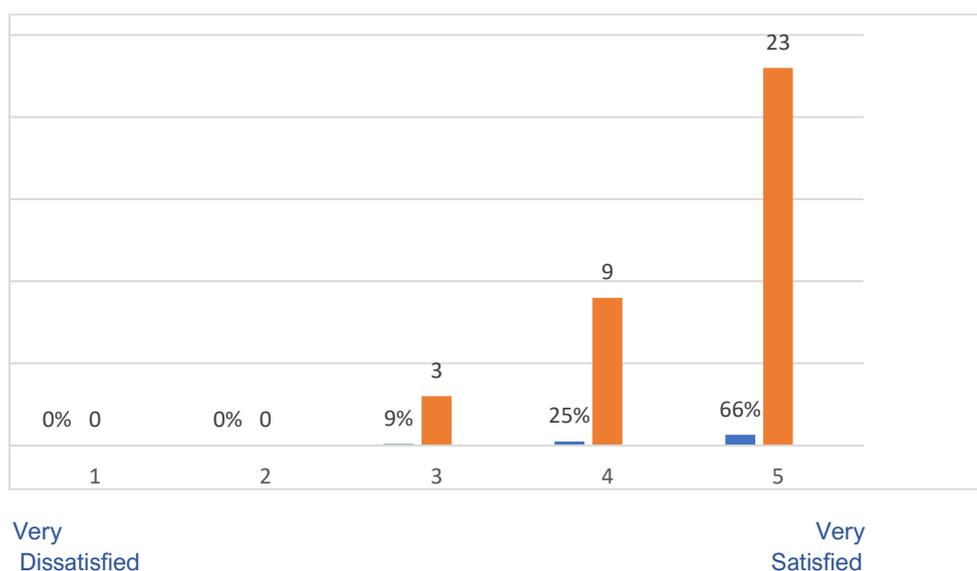
Length of membership of Most Senior Members compared with all respondents:

Number of Most Senior Member responses (35)		Percentage of all responses (315)	Length of time a member
1	3%	21.9%	2 years or less
8	23%	35.2%	From 2-5 years
9	26%	24.8%	From 5-10 years
17	49%	18.1%	10 years or more

The table above shows that 49%, or almost half of the Most Senior Members have been members for 10 years or longer compared with only 18% of 'all respondents'. This is a significant finding, demonstrating that U3A Croydon keeps elderly citizens connected, active, engaged and supported in their later years.

How satisfied are you, overall, with your membership at U3A Croydon?

35 responses



Number of Most Senior Member responses (35)	Percentage of all responses (315)	How satisfied are you with your membership at U3A Croydon?
23	66%	Very satisfied
9	25%	Satisfied
3	9%	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
0	0%	Dissatisfied
0	0%	Very dissatisfied

Most Senior Member respondents' satisfaction is very slightly lower than the percentages for 'all respondents' for 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied' ratings, and higher for the mid-range rating. Fewer in this group were dissatisfied with their membership.

Given that many of the games, craft and line dancing classes, preferred by the Most Senior Members, are held in the Scout Hall discussed earlier, the ratings are encouragingly positive.

Courses and activities

The responses for courses in 2018 and 2019 remained highly consistent, with Most Senior Members taking the same course or activity as they did last year.

15 Most Senior Members, or getting close to half, took **exercise classes** in 2018 and 14 will do so again in 2019. Most indicated they participated in more gentle exercise activities such as yoga/tai chi, then dancing and 'other' exercise activities.

Nine members, about a quarter, were enrolled in **games** in 2018 and will do so again in 2019, nearly twice as many as the percentage of 'all respondents'.

Crafts was another popular course for Most Senior Members, with seven, about one in five, taking craft in 2018 and six in 2019, slightly higher than the percentage of 'all respondents'.

Other courses and activities that Most Senior Members participated in during 2018 and will again in 2019 were music/choir, art, and reading/speech/book club.

Tech/computer courses

None of the Most Senior Members took computer classes in 2018 and one indicated they would in 2019.

Yet nine members of this group did indicate an interest in learning about tech/computers where a 'help desk' and 'how to use your own devices' were an option. Two were also interested in an introductory or set course in programs such as Office and Windows 10.

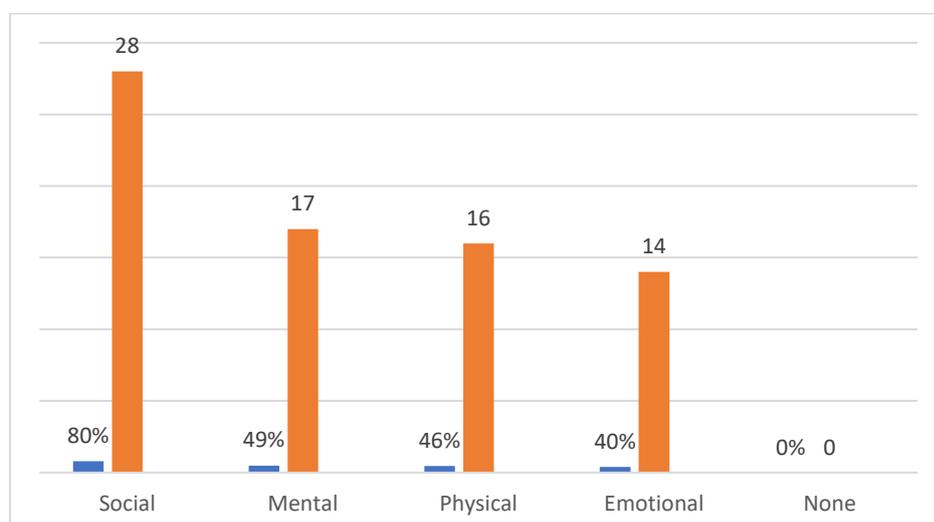
Three expressed an interest in bringing their own phone, one a tablet and one a laptop. Three would prefer to learn on a U3A supplied laptop.

Benefits of being a member of U3A Croydon

Our Most Senior Member respondents were asked what benefits they gained from their participation in U3A Croydon's courses and activities:

What benefits, if any, have you gained from your membership at U3A Croydon?

35 responses, respondents could choose more than one answer



U3A Croydon's Members' Feedback Survey, January 2019

Number of Most Senior Member responses (35)		Percentage of all responses (315)	Benefits to being a member
28	80%	87%	Social -Friendships, social interaction, companionship
17	49%	68%	Mental - Knowledge, skills, mental stimulation
16	46%	54%	Physical - Health, fitness, being more active
14	40%	44%	Emotional - Wellbeing, confidence, contributing, valued
0	0%	2%	None

All perceived benefits are lower for the Most Senior Members than the percentages for 'all respondents' except for the 'none' responses.

The greatest discrepancy is the lower number of Most Senior Members who benefitted 'mentally' from their involvement in U3A Croydon courses and activities.

As with 'all respondents', the social aspect of the Most Senior Members' participation at U3A is most important to them.

Comments about their participation at U3A Croydon

Despite the lower ratings than for 'all respondents', several Most Senior Members commented on how much they enjoyed the courses and expressed their gratitude towards the tutors. Others expressed what U3A Croydon had meant to them over the years:

'I appreciate the feeling given by the tutors that I matter, that I count in the class, I belong!'

'I joined in 1992 when Croydon U3A had just had their 1st birthday. I have always enjoyed U3A. I have written in U3A's 20-year history book, I have done a lot of classes, led a class, and helped a lot in the early days with Dot Ward (the founder of U3A Croydon).'

Some Most Senior Members mentioned that their participation in U3A kept them feeling happy, healthy and that they have enjoyed the friendship and made some good friends. Some of the more deep-felt responses were:

'As a carer of a sick wife I have no opportunity to get out much. One day a week my wife goes to respite, and I can go to my class. The members of this class became my friends, and this does a lot for my wellbeing.'

'I feel if it wasn't for being a member of U3A for 22 years, I wouldn't be as happy and healthy as I am today. Thank you.'

In summary

The Most Senior Members, who are over aged 81 and do not have an email address, share some unique features:

- They are older than the average U3A Croydon member,
- Many have been members for a long period, many over 10 years,

- They may be vulnerable to social isolation as they are not technologically 'connected', and
- Their older age suggests they most need to remain active, healthy and engaged.

The length of time Most Senior Members have been a member of U3A Croydon, along with the high number that indicated they gained social benefits from their membership, implies that the Most Senior Members feel connected to the organisation and have relied on their membership at U3A Croydon to provide a social network as they have aged.

The high number of Most Senior Members who have been members for 10 years or more is evidence that demonstrates the value of U3A Croydon in keeping senior citizens active, engaged and connected to their community, maintaining their health and wellbeing.

The Most Senior Members' responses indicate that as they have aged the choices of courses and activities have changed to suit changing physical abilities.

U3A Croydon has provided ongoing opportunities for older members to reduce their risk of social isolation and to keep fitter and healthier than they would have been without U3A. Not only have the Most Senior Members found enduring friendships and companionships from their participation at U3A Croydon, they have also become friends and companions, and perhaps mentors, to other members.

Conclusion

'I hope to keep attending for many years to come!'

U3A Croydon is a popular organisation that is valued by its members, despite the often inadequate venues and facilities. Members form strong friendships, feel a part of the U3A community and for many their involvement is enduring and essential to their wellbeing.

The connectedness and sense of belonging members feel to U3A Croydon is expressed, not only in the benefits they reported, but in the high response rate to the survey of 40.3%. Almost 45% of respondents have been a member for five years or more.

It is likely that that about a third of members live alone, so the contribution that U3A Croydon makes to this group is significant in reducing social isolation and supporting social connectedness which is vital to their wellbeing.

Generally, members feel the organisation is well run and offers a good range of courses and activities. Many respondents expressed their appreciation for the services the organisation offers, their gratitude to the tutors and volunteers, and for the positive difference being a member of U3A has made to their lives.

Many members appreciate the low cost of membership, currently at \$50 per year, which enables them to participate in many courses and activities they would not otherwise be able to afford.

Findings show that U3A Croydon could better meet the need of members interested in tech/computer courses by offering a broader range of courses and by delivering them differently. In particular, members want 'help desk' type classes and they want to bring their own devices.

Most members are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their membership at U3A Croydon. Yet there was a high level of dissatisfaction with the quality of venues, which were seen as unsuitable as classroom space, poorly maintained, dirty and lacking in appropriate storage and up-to-date facilities.

The high number of respondents who indicated they had gained physical, mental and social benefits from their courses and activities indicates that U3A Croydon contributes significantly to both state and local government's Healthy Ageing agenda to support the health and wellbeing of older people and reduce their risk of social isolation.

In particular, U3A Croydon supports older members, who are more at risk of health problems and social isolation, to remain healthy, active and connected with friends and community.

The findings of the survey demonstrate that U3A Croydon is achieving its mission and is an important organisation for senior members of the Maroondah community. More recognition and support from state and local government for appropriate venues and facilities would enable U3A to expand to reach more senior members of the local community, which would benefit the ageing community of Maroondah further.

Attachment 1: METHODOLOGY

The survey sample, distribution and response rate

From 30th November to 14th December 2018, U3A Croydon invited members to 'have their say' by completing a Members' Feedback Survey. The survey asked demographic questions and invited general comments and feedback about its courses and activities through both closed questions and open-ended comment boxes.

The survey also asked what benefits, if any, members gained from their participation in the organisation's courses and activities. This question links the survey responses to the organisation's Mission Statement as well as the broader governmental 'healthy ageing' agenda at a federal, state and local level. It also addresses the criteria of the ACFE2 grant to assist the scope of further research conducted by the Network and other U3As.

The survey was trialled on committee members before being refined and finalised for members to complete. The survey was distributed via email to an on-line link to Google Forms to 626 members, and via the postal service to 154 members without emails with a postage paid return envelope. There was a two-week window for members to complete and return the survey.

The week prior to the distribution of the surveys, membership totalled 1034 members. The survey was distributed just after an early enrolment period for 2019 courses. The address labels for members without emails were printed off before the enrolment period and surveys mailed out just after. The emailed link to the on-line survey was sent several days after the mail-out, so that all members would receive the survey at around the same time.

Because the re-enrolment process in UMAS resets the membership to those who have re-enrolled for the next year, the number of active members after the re-enrolment period decreased in the UMAS system. All members without emails enrolled in 2018 received a survey, but 254 members with emails who were enrolled for classes in 2018 but had not yet enrolled for 2019 did not receive a link to the survey.

The Google Forms program accrued the responses in a general report as new responses were received. Surveys that were mailed back to the office were inputted via the link to the on-line survey by the author of this report.

One of the 'comments' questions was inadvertently left off the surveys that were mailed out to members: 'Are there any new courses/activities you would like to see?'. This omission did not affect the findings, and some respondents gave answers to this question in other sections of the survey.

Another issue was with the question: 'If you are interested in Tech/Computer activities, what device/s would you prefer to use?' Respondents completing the on-line survey could only choose one answer. But 12 of the no-email respondents who answered this question choose more than one answer on the paper surveys. In these cases, one answer was selected, and selections were distributed so as to be representative of the categories indicated by these 12 survey respondents.

From a total of 780 members who received the survey, 227 on-line responses and 88 mailed responses were received. This is a 40.3% response rate.

Surveys Sent		Responses Received	
Emailed	626	227	36%
Mailed	154	88	57%
Total	780	315	40.3%

There is a higher proportion of mailed survey responses (57%) compared with on-line survey responses (36%).

The total sample is slightly biased in favour of:

- 'early enrollers' who are more likely to be volunteers or tutors and those who want to get into the popular classes they were in the previous year; and
- 'no email' members who returned a paper copy of the survey who are more likely to be older and to have been a member for longer.

Despite the slight bias towards older and more committed members, the high response rate of 40.3% gives confidence that the survey findings are a reliable indicator of the characteristics and experiences of U3A Croydon's membership as a whole.

There were also two members who did not complete a survey but who wanted to make comments. Their comments have been included in the total of comments received and dealt with in the same manner as other comments.