



Northumbria Region



Research Ideas from the Third Age: A Competition for U3A Members in the Northumbria Region

Northumbria Region U3A and VOICE North are holding an exciting competition open to all U3A members in the region and full details are attached. Our aim is to identify good ideas for research to address a question either in some basic or applied area of knowledge. There will be prizes of £1000, £500 and £250 for the three best entries but, more importantly, applicants with good ideas will have the opportunity to collaborate with researchers at Newcastle University (and possibly elsewhere) and hopefully see their proposal taken forward in partnership.

There is a considerable amount of publicly-funded research undertaken on problems and policy issues that affect the lives and well-being of older people. VOICE North was set up on the recommendation of the North East Regional Forum on Ageing to give older people a much greater role in shaping the research agenda and involving them in the research process. It is hosted by Newcastle University which carries out world class research on ageing and the impact of demographic change. The University believes that it is absolutely essential to harness the intellectual capital and experience of older people if we are to flourish as a region.

Major areas of research where Newcastle University and its partners have particular interests include: Wellbeing and Quality of Life; Social Inclusion in the Digital Economy; Design for Life; Work and Lifelong Learning; Dementia and the Community; Older People and Business. However, through VOICE North we can access experts in almost any field and research proposals are welcome in any field of science, technology or the arts and humanities.

The competition may sound beyond the reach of most ordinary U3A members but it is not: we all come across unanswered questions in our daily lives or areas of interest, or have experience with products and services which are not appropriate for older (and many other) people and which we think could be improved. The focus of the competition is on the originality and feasibility of the research idea – detailed knowledge of how to tackle the problem is where the experts come in so knowledge of the best methods is not necessary. The application is quite short – two sides at most – and as many or as few members (or U3As) as necessary can work together on a proposal.

We are not aware that a competition quite like this has been held before and it would be wonderful to see a good crop of applications from U3As in the Northumbria region. It would open up the possibility of much greater regular involvement of U3As in research – something that was envisaged at the founding of the Third Age Trust but has proved difficult to implement. It will provide brilliant publicity for the U3As involved and if successful will help to change the perceptions of researchers about the need to engage more deeply with older people.

So, put your thinking caps on. Use your lifetime of learning and experience. Keep a note of ideas as they come to you. There are almost four months in which to develop your ideas. We hope there will be individuals in each U3A willing to organise meetings of those interested in taking part. Speak to people you know outside of U3A too, if you think they might have ideas or insight on problems that come to mind. Let's work together to put U3As in the Northumbria Region on the national map for creativity and innovation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Leiper', with a stylized, overlapping flourish above the name.

John Leiper
Chairman – Northumbria Region U3A

Footnote:

The competition is being sponsored by Newcastle University as part of its Changing Age initiative. As a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence, Newcastle recognises the importance of harnessing its efforts to help address ageing as one of the major challenges facing society today. Changing Age has produced a Charter to promote change in attitudes towards ageing and older people and a copy of this is attached.



Northumbria Region

‘RESEARCH IDEAS FROM THE THIRD AGE’ A RESEARCH COMPETITION

Northumbria Region U3A and **VOICE North** work to support and harness the intellectual capital of older people, for the personal wellbeing of those involved as well as the common good. We have recently signed a concordat to collaborate in promoting our distinct but complementary roles. This competition for research ideas is being held to celebrate the partnership.

VOICE North stands for ‘Valuing Our Intellectual Capital and Experience’. It was established by Newcastle University’s Institute for Ageing and Health to provide a panel of older people who would engage with research – not just in academic projects, but also around policy-making and the design of products and services. VOICE North aspires to deep engagement, where the ideas of older people help shape the research agenda and where they are actively involved in the research process.

The competition ‘Research Ideas from the Third Age’ is extremely flexible: it is open to any individual member, or group of members, from a U3A or consortium of U3As in the Northumbria Region. The number of entries is not restricted. The application form (attached) is relatively short and the deadline for entries is Wednesday 21 March 2012.

The quality, originality and feasibility of the research idea will be the main criteria by which entries will be judged. Applicants can propose to: (i) address a basic research question in any area of knowledge; or (ii) undertake design research to invent or improve a product or service; or (iii) undertake research required for a business proposal.

There will be prizes of £1000, £500 and £250 awarded to the U3As from which the three winning entries are submitted, to be used for any educational purpose. More importantly, the winning applicants (and, it is hoped, any other entries that are considered of sufficient quality) will be put in contact with university research groups by VOICE North with the aim of developing a joint bid for funding to carry out the research and disseminate the results. Given the uncertainty of research outcomes, it is entirely possible that ideas that are only ‘runners up’ in the view of the judges may be the most successful in the longer term.

Details of the most appropriate and effective methods required for the research proposal are thus not so important in the competition entry since the university teams involved will bring their knowledge to the partnerships. Some projects may be best undertaken by postgraduate students in partnership with the U3A applicant(s) and we are hoping for a wide variety and scale of ideas that can be taken forward.

Entries will be judged by a panel of experts from Newcastle University and representatives from Northumbria Region U3A. The panel will be able to advise if there is potential

intellectual property which needs to be protected or other issues such as ethical consent that need to be tackled before entries are taken further or made public.

Results will be announced at a joint event between Northumbria Region U3A and VOICE North to be organised in early June 2012 when the best proposals will be presented and prizes awarded to the winners.

'Research Ideas from the Third Age' is sponsored by **Changing Age** – the first of Newcastle University's three 'societal challenge themes' - established to apply international research excellence to impact on major challenges that affect the North East of England.

Please complete your application adhering strictly to the headings, six sections and word limits on sections as shown below, and return to John Leiper, Chairman, Northumbria Region U3A, at lorbottle@tiscali.co.uk or by post to Marlfield Lodge, by Coldstream, Berwickshire, TD12 4JT.

1. Name and full contact details of the lead applicant:

Names of co-applicants if any:

Please specify whether this is an application from: (i) an individual U3A member; (ii) a group of members from a single U3A; or (iii) a consortium from more than one U3A

2. Title of proposed research project:

3. Background, aims and summary of the research project (Up to a maximum of one side of A4 to be used):

4. The expected benefits and impact of the research (maximum of 100 words):

5. The potential to involve U3A members in the further design, execution, dissemination or implementation of the project (maximum of 200 words)

6. Any further comments you wish to make about or in support of your application (maximum of 100 words)

PLEASE NOTE: The deadline for applications is Wednesday 21 March 2012

Newcastle Charter for Changing Age

'Changing Age' is the University's response to the societal challenge of ageing. Population ageing presents an enormous array of challenges affecting all aspects of human life: health, wellbeing, finance, work, social organisation and culture.

As a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence, Newcastle University is committed to solving, not just describing, the challenges of ageing in order to make the very most of our increasingly long lives.

We were early to recognise the importance of ageing and have achieved strong international recognition for research excellence in this field. Changing Age builds on this to enhance the University's profile and impact through improved engagement with the civic environment and as an exemplar of social and economic impact.

The number of older people in our population has increased dramatically. This trend will continue for the foreseeable future. A radical reassessment of the place of older people in society is long overdue. This must be accompanied by a profound change in attitudes to ageing, informed by facts and not by outdated misconceptions.

Too often, political debate has focused on population ageing as a negative issue, a burden to be managed. This negativity pervades attitudes commonly seen in the media, business, employment, education and even in health and social care. Political leadership is needed to promote change across society.

- **Increased life spans represent one of humanity's greatest achievements**

For the great majority of the population, health and wellbeing have improved. Illness and death have been postponed through centuries of scientific research, ingenuity and perseverance.

- **Increasing life expectancy is an economic good**
 Longevity has made, and continues to make, an enormously positive contribution to our economy. Older people are contributors and consumers of products and services, adding substantially to economic growth.
- **Ageing concerns us all**
 Those who are young today will in time be old. Those who are old were once young.
- **Each individual has an equal place in our society regardless of age**
 The blind eye that is so often turned to the scourge of ageism, in its widespread and corrosive forms, can no longer be accepted. Ageism should be outlawed to the same extent as racism, sexism and religious discrimination.
- **Much better information about older people is needed**
 We need to know about the contributions, capabilities, needs and aspirations of older people in their enormous diversity. Older people should neither be marginalised nor treated as a separate category (the elderly) within society.
- **Older people are an under-acknowledged asset**
 The mental capital and skills of older people should no longer go to waste. Arbitrary ages of compulsory retirement or of exclusion from full participation in any social activity, including education, should in future be abolished.
- **We need to use and expand our scientific knowledge about ageing**
 Transformational reorganisation and reprioritisation of health research and service provision is needed to take account of new advances in understanding the connections between ageing and health.
- **We need urgently to adapt infrastructure for an ageing population**
 Commitments are needed to begin as soon as possible to adapt national and local infrastructure for transport, housing, and communications to accommodate the changing age structure of our population. This will create major opportunities for industrial growth.

You can pledge your support at:

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/about/values/societal/changingage/supporters/>

