

u3a members support a Commissioner for Older People xxx

According to a recent survey, 87% of u3a members think it is a good idea to have a Commissioner for Older People and Ageing

Members overwhelmingly support having a Commissioner for Older People.

According to a recent survey, 87% of respondents think it is a good idea to have a commissioner, which aligns with Age UK data.

Given the increasing numbers and diversity of older people, having an independent person to advocate on behalf of all older people was seen as very important.

In the words of one member “There is an increasing number of people living longer. We need someone, independent, with legal status, connected to each government in the UK, who promotes the needs of older people.”

Members are concerned that the voices of older people are being overlooked when new policies and practices are introduced, and this is leading to more exclusion particularly due to the rapid transition to a digital world.

Another member said “Without a Champion and someone able to identify issues which impact on older citizens, we will become increasingly invisible and our agendas overlooked.”

Members highlighted a huge range of issues that such a role could and should address. Most common was access to services (including health and social care) (85%), followed by social isolation and loneliness (83%), and ageism and discrimination (78%). Age friendly communities, access to affordable and appropriate housing, public transport, and design that included and factored in the needs of older people were some other issues identified.

While members acknowledged that many of these issues should be the responsibility of government, having a champion for the rights and needs of older people would hold the government to account.

Earlier this year, u3a signed joint statements with other organisations to call for a Commissioner for Older People and Ageing in England and Scotland, like there is in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Recently u3a members had the opportunity to hear from Hélena Herklots, the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales. While many members were already supportive, many others changed their minds about the importance of the role as a result of hearing her speak.

Not everyone was convinced that a commissioner was a good idea. Some questioned whether it was a good use of funds particularly given that so many other agencies do this work, and whether such a person could “speak and act appropriately for the diverse older generation that is the UK today”.

This latter concern may be particularly pertinent for u3a members who are so vibrant and active in their communities.

However, it may be that a commissioner could ably represent the perspectives of u3a members, as the following member says, “As older people we still have a lot that we can give back to support our communities and the younger generations. We have skills, knowledge and experience that can be harnessed for the greater good of our communities and this needs to be recognised and exploited.

“A Commissioner for Older People and Ageing will help us create and achieve those opportunities.”

Find out more about the work we are doing to change narratives around ageing on [Our Impact](#)