



Group Leaders Handbook

Thank you for agreeing to organise an interest group. We are sure you will find it very rewarding, however, it might seem a bit daunting initially. This information is intended to provide advice and support with this. The handbook is based on common practice within the u3a nationally, However as each u3a is operationally independent please check with your Groups Coordinator and/or your committee if you have any concerns.

Introduction to interest groups

It is often said that interest groups are the life blood of the u3a and each group will develop its own structure. However, it is important that your group follows the u3a ethos of shared, participative and self-help learning. 'The teachers learn, and the learners teach.' The result then will be not only an increase in knowledge, but a supportive and friendly atmosphere which enables everyone to participate.

u3a principles

The u3a ethos is based on three principles:

The Third Age Principle:

- Membership of a u3a is open to all in their third age.
- Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a u3a.
- Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a u3a can do so.

The Self-Help Learning principle:

- Members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire.
- Learning is by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards.
- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers. They are all u3a members.

The Mutual Aid principle:

- Each u3a is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent but a member of the Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the u3a movement.
- No payments are made to members for services to any u3a.
- Each u3a is self-funded with membership subscriptions kept as low as possible.
- Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the u3a.



The first steps to forming a new group

Recommended steps to undertake:

- Agree the development of your group with the Group Coordinator and/or u3a Committee.
- Liaise with the Group Coordinator/Treasurer regarding the financing of the group and how this needs to be reported, where relevant. (Equipment and venue hire etc.)
- Consider what the aims of the group are – what are you hoping to learn/achieve/share by offering the group?
- Is there an existing [Subject Adviser](#) who can support with ideas for the development of the group? An alternative to Subject Advisers might be to contact neighbouring U3As to see if they have a similar subject group and then talk to the group leader to get some first-hand knowledge. It may be that you could sit in on a group meeting.
- Generate interest by promoting your group using as many different methods as possible. This could include developing publicity in the form of a flyer, poster, promotion via existing groups, via the u3a newsletter, talking to members in groups that you attend. The more methods you use, the more successful you are likely to be.
- Would the activities benefit from having a risk assessment completed for the group? You should consider whether there are any risks that might occur as a result of the group's activities and, if you identify any, talk to the Group Coordinator who will advise you on risk assessment procedures.
- Organise an initial meeting and invite people to attend. Identify what you want to achieve from your first meeting.

The first meeting

These are some recommended steps to take at the first meeting:

- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the group as you see it.
- Ask about the skills within the group and agree, if relevant, the level that the group will be aimed at – beginners, improvers, advanced.
- Agree how the group will work– discussion, instruction, presentation etc
- Agree when and where the group will run and consider the tasks that need doing to run the group and who is willing to support these .
- Identify any accessibility needs that group members may have. Refer to the U3APlus website for advice and guidance: <https://plus.u3a.org.uk/>.
- Agree the costs for running the group and what members will pay.
- Discuss how group members will communicate with each other bearing in mind data protection concerns. Consider using either email or WhatsApp etc.
- Agree some ground rules e.g.
 - Be punctual
 - Listen to each other
 - Allow others to speak
 - Let someone know if you are unable to come
 - Agree to disagree amicably and be respectful to other group members
 - Every contribution matters
 - Have patience with and encourage those who are slower to learn



Remember – please pass feedback of what was agreed at the first meeting to your [Group Coordinator](#) to finalise arrangements.

Help and support

Resources

Subject Advisers: The Third Age Trust have volunteers with specialist knowledge in a wide range of topics. Contact details on the [National Website](#) and in Third Age Matters.

External organisations: Museums, libraries, schools, universities.

u3a publications: Check the national website for the latest publications.

Networks, regions, neighbouring U3As: allow you to draw on experience from within the movement.

Regional Trustee: will provide an overview of the region and a link to National Office.

National Office: The staff team are available Monday to Friday to offer support.

Other learning opportunities

- Shared Learning Projects and Shared Learning Project Coordinators – contact details available from the national website
- National and Regional Summer Schools
- Events facilitated by National Office
- National, Regional and Network Workshops and study days
- Outreach departments of universities

Sharing information

It can be good to share information about your group which can be done in a number of ways:

- On the u3a website
- By setting up a Facebook group or page
- Via social media
- In the u3a newsletter
- Via Sources or Sources Online
- At regional, network or local events

Policies and procedures

Your Committee and/or Group Coordinator will advise you of the u3a Insurance arrangements as well as policies and procedures that you need to be aware of. These will include matters concerning:

- Finance – please contact our [Treasurer](#)
- [Data Protection](#)
- [Safeguarding](#)
- [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Grievance Procedure](#)
- [Incident reporting](#)

It is recommended that you also have a look at the advice section of the [National Office website](#) where a range of useful information can be found. You will need to create an account and login the first time. It is also a good idea to sign up to the newsletter that is sent out by the Trust every month as this will keep you up to date with wider u3a news. You can sign up to the newsletter via the national website.



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Problem solving

Sometimes issues can arise within a group that disrupt the smooth running and spoil the enjoyment for everyone. Don't leave a problem too long before trying to resolve it. Talk to your Group Coordinator or Committee if you are unsure how to resolve the problem or just want someone to explore options with. You can also ring National Office if you want to talk something through or check something out.

Issues between group members

Where there is potential for friction it is advisable to begin by bringing it into the open. Either you or another person could try to facilitate a discussion either with the members concerned or with the whole group, but it is important that the facilitator remains neutral and non-judgemental. If you cannot reach a resolution informally speak to your Group Coordinator or a member your Committee. If a situation does not resolve and becomes acrimonious your Committee can consult the advice on disciplinary procedure provided by the Trust. There are also Trust Volunteers trained to support with resolving disputes.

Accidents and incidents

To ensure that your group & activities are covered by the u3a's insurance, you should ensure that the Group Coordinator has an up to date Risk Assessment form completed by you. Some groups visiting different venues may need to undertake a separate risk assessment for individual visits. Please feel free to seek advice from the Group Coordinator if in doubt Report all accidents and incidents to your Committee as soon as possible and complete an incident report form-a template form is available on our [Winchcombe u3a website](#). It is as well to have an accurate record in case of future problems relating to the incident.

Remember that the Third Age Trust provides [insurance for group activities](#).

And finally. . .

Thank you for reading this far. Do enjoy your group and thank you!