



## Group Coordinators Handbook

### Introduction to interest groups

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 handbook is intended to provide advice and support with this.

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 result will not only be an increase in knowledge, but a supportive and friendly atmosphere which enables everyone to participate.

### The first steps to forming a new group

You may be taking over from an existing Group Coordinator or starting a new group. If you are starting a new group, these are the recommended steps to undertake:

- Agree the development of your group with the Groups Coordinator/TSu3a committee.
- Generate interest by promoting your group using as many different methods as possible. This could include via TSu3a newsletter, sharing at monthly meetings, requesting expressions of interest, talking to members in other groups
- Identify what you want to achieve from your first meeting.
- Organise an initial meeting and invite those who have expressed an interest to attend.
- Read the Policy and Procedure Manual on TSu3a website, especially the section relating to Groups.
- Arrange tuition for yourself to access Beacon and Tsu3a website
- Being a coordinator requires some thought and planning, is enjoyable and not difficult.

### The first group meeting

Recommended steps to take at the first meeting:

- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the group as you see it.
- Ask about any relevant skills and experience within the group.
- Agree how the group will work
  - Where meetings will be held  
*one member's house, a rota of members' houses, hired premises*
  - When and how often meetings will happen  
*Monthly, twice monthly, weekly. Consult group timetable on TSu3a website*
  - How many members in the group  
*May depend on where you intend to hold the meetings*
  - How the meetings will be run  
*Same leader each time, a rota of leaders, taught classes, self-taught group*
- Agree the tasks that need doing to run the group and who is willing to support these – for example, who is willing to help with developing the programme or keep the register.
- Agree the costs for running the group and what members will pay. If it is to be funded by your committee agree a budget with them.
- Discuss how group members will communicate with each other bearing in mind data protection guidance and always seek permission and agreement.

After your first meeting it is a good idea to feedback what was agreed to your Groups Coordinator to finalise arrangements.

### **Running an interest group**

Most issues can be resolved by referring to TSu3a's policy document on the website.

Things to remember when running a group

- Keep a register of attendees
- Keep an income and expenditure account if you are handling money and submit to the treasurer immediately after the year end
- Overhead costs have to be borne by all members, even if they do not attend a meeting
- Keep your web page up to date by checking at least every six months
- Check membership of your group in early May by referring to Beacon and seeing if any have turned red, showing that they are no longer members
- Follow the data protection rules at all times
- An incident form has to be completed for every incident, however small; in certain circumstances a risk assessment might have to be undertaken
- You do not have to do everything yourself, you are allowed to delegate
- Contact those who have not attended for a while and have not indicated that they are no longer interested and perhaps gently ask when they intend to return. This is particularly important if you have waiting list

### **Payment of tutors for groups**

If there is not expertise within the group then it is possible to hire a tutor but there are conditions:

- It must be agreed by the committee
- The cost must be met by group members
- If the tutor is a member of Totton South or any other u3a they cannot be paid
- The tutor must have their own insurance cover



## Some extra information from the Third Age Trust Group Convenor's Handbook

### 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.

### Participative learning and learning styles

The value of the u3a style of learning is that everyone can contribute and by doing so will gain a feeling of self-worth and integration. We all learn in different ways and variation in content, method and style can make the learning experience more vibrant and appealing which you can bring to your group.

### Help and support

#### Resources

- **Subject Advisers** are Trust Volunteers with specialist knowledge in a wide range of topics. Their contact details are available on the [u3a website](#) and in the Third Age Matters magazine. Subject Advisers can provide advice on both the setting up of a group of their particular subject area and the sustainability of ones already in existence, which may benefit from new ideas or a different approach.
- [u3a Subject networks](#) provide a platform for u3a members to connect and come together around their interests.
- [Networks, regions and neighbouring u3as](#) allow you to draw on experience from within the movement.
- [u3a website](#), in particular the support for u3as section
- **External organisations** such as museums, libraries, schools, universities.

### Third Age Trust Workshops

The u3a office runs a number of online workshops to support all Trustees, including 'Interest Group Matters' which covers the information in this handbook and more. The workshops also provide an opportunity to meet other u3a members from across the country. More information about other workshop topics and how to book can be found on the [u3a workshops page](#).

### Sharing information

It can be good to share information about your group which can be done in several ways:

- On your u3a website
- By setting up a Facebook group or page
- Using your u3a's social media accounts
- In your u3a newsletter
- At regional, network or local events
- Via your Region/ Nation PR Adviser. If you aren't sure who they are in your Region/Nation, please contact your [Regional Trustee](#).

### Policies and procedures

Your committee and/or Groups 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
- Data protection
- Safeguarding
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Accessibility
- Complaints
- Incident reporting

There is also more information about all these areas on the [Support for u3as](#) section of the u3a website. (You will need to set up a log in to access this page if you haven't already done

### Accidents and incidents

If an emergency incident happens during a group you should call the emergency services as soon as possible. Report all accidents and incidents to your committee as soon as possible and complete an incident form. An [Incident Report form template](#) is available on the u3a website. It is important to have an accurate record in case of future problems relating to the incident. For example, if damage is caused to property by a member of the group, take full details, as it may be the subject of an insurance claim. The Third Age Trust provides insurance for group activities, and although personal accident insurance cover is not provided by the Third Age Trust, the insurance does cover all u3a members. Further details (including excess levels) can be found on the [u3a website](#).

For some groups you may consider it necessary to ask members to hold or provide emergency contact details. To request contact details, you need to complete a [legitimate interest assessment form](#) available from the u3a website.