



Ashtead University of the Third Age

Guidelines on how to run a Group

u3a interest groups can be run in a variety of ways to suit the background experience of the Group Contact and the requirements of the group members. The styles can vary from fully shared learning, with members taking the lead in turn, to instructional learning with all the variants between being quite acceptable. Some Group Contacts share the role and others act only as facilitator. The groups should, however, be run in ways sympathetic to the Principles of the u3a Movement. (Appendix 1) It is not within the ethos of the u3a Movement to pay members for their services or to use paid tutors.

Support in setting up groups

The Group Contact helps set up a new group by gathering information on members' interests and ascertaining if there is support for a new group. There are many sources of support available to a Group Contact including; members of the group; the Groups Coordinator; the extensive services of the Third Age Trust; Network Coordinators who are advertised in Third Age Matters. (Appendices 2 and 3)

Advertising meetings

Once the group has decided on a programme of meetings the Group Contact should let the Groups Coordinator know the dates and timings so that an up-to-date list can be maintained and advertised to members as described above. Any changes should be notified - this also applies when the group has reached its desired size and is no longer able to offer places to members. Consideration can then be given to starting another group.

Group membership

The Group Contact should check that all attendees are members of Ashtead u3a. A list of regular attendees should be provided to the Groups Coordinator at least once each year to check (see also Group Contacts meeting). Members from other u3a s can be accepted but only if there are spare places.

For people attending a Group as a 'taster' or in Groups with 'fluid' membership (eg walking groups) Group Leaders should ensure all participants are u3a members. This is important, as Third-Party claims that may be incurred are only covered for u3a Members.

Group funds

Groups should be self-sufficient so that the Group Contact is not out of pocket. It is up to the group to decide how to build up funds - perhaps a sum 'up front' or a yearly contribution to the Contact for expenses, etc. could reduce the admin burden of asking little and often and will focus the minds of prospective members about joining. Funds held should only be sufficient to maintain the Groups' activities. Rent for halls can add complications. It is suggested that members pay in advance a sum equal to the amount of advanced rental required by the hirer.

Incidental costs

It is suggested that if the group is run in a member's home and tea is provided a contribution to cover costs be paid by each member of the group towards this expense. The cost of any incidentals, e.g. phone calls, postage, or photocopying (5p per sheet is suggested for printing at home), library hire for books, videos, music etc. should also be shared between the group members.

Car transport

If car sharing takes place in respect of the Groups' activities, e.g. trips, lifts to venues etc., it should be left to the individuals concerned to make their own arrangements for sharing fuel costs.

u3a third party insurance

The Third Age Trust has an insurance policy covering Group Contacts and members in all u3a's against third party liability. There is public and products liability cover up to £5m with an excess of £250. This is useful when hiring venues and covers against legal liability for all events where negligence may be established. Details of the cover are available upon request. This does not include personal accident cover. The Third Age Trust public liability insurance only covers u3a Group Leaders and members.

Accident report form

Group Contacts should make sure they have copies of the u3a Accident Report Form. (Appendix 4) These can be obtained from the Secretary. The Group Contact will make every attempt to ensure the safety of members at meetings or on outings, but members take part in all events at their own risk.

Members' illness

The Chairman should be advised if a member passes away. This does not prevent groups sending their own cards or flowers, but the Chairman is responsible for making an appropriate response on behalf of Ashtead u3a.

Group contacts' meeting

It is intended that there will be an annual meeting for all Group Contacts. This will be an opportunity to discuss the way our u3a is being run and feedback any comments and suggestions in respect of future support for group activities. Prior to this meeting, the Group Contact should submit a list of group members and any group assets to the Groups Coordinator.

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Appendix 1

The Universities of the Third Age (u3a's) in the United Kingdom are autonomous, self-help organisations run by the voluntary efforts of their members. All u3a's are members of the Third Age Trust (a Registered Charity) which is their national support and advisory body. The word 'university' is used in its original sense of people coming together to share and pursue learning in all its forms. u3a's have the following aims and guiding principles:

The principles of the u3a movement

The u3a Movement is non-religious and non-political and has three main principles:

The Third Age Principle

- a) Membership of a u3a is open to all in their third age, which is defined not by a particular age but by a period in life in which full time employment has ceased.
- b) Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a u3a.
- c) Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a u3a can do so.

The Self-help Learning Principle

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

The Mutual Aid Principle

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

Support services from the third age trust

These learning support services are available centrally. They are free, or charged at cost, and are only a telephone call or email away. The Third Age Trust has a website with further information about these services.

Resource Centre

The Resource Centre, in the National Office at Bromley, has a collection of material (other than books) available for all u3a groups to borrow free of charge except for the cost of return postage. There are slides, videos, audio cassettes, CDs and DVDs available in many subject areas. Lists are free and available on request. There is a registration form available or you may register online. You will be issued with a user number that will allow you to search the catalogue online. Loans are for a period of three weeks and may be renewed on request if not needed elsewhere. Items will be sent, in strong but light packaging, by post with a return date. If you are able to obtain a certificate of posting when returning items then please do so but it is not essential. There is no need to use registered post. If they do not have what you need, it may be possible to obtain it.

'Sources'

'Sources' is the educational journal of u3a s. Although each issue has a subject focus, items on any matter relevant to education in the third age are welcomed. For advice on suitability contact the chair of the editorial panel and for details about length, format etc contact the editor. It is published three times a year and is included with Third Age Matters.

Subject Co-ordinators and Networks

This is a subject advisory service. A subject coordinator is a subject specialist who is willing to share their knowledge and experience. They may offer all or some of the following - 'Start Up' leaflets, telephone or email consultation, networks, newsletters, study days. Contact the Subject Coordinator for details. If there is no Subject Coordinator for your subject, and you think that you could contribute in this way, please contact the National Subject Networks Coordinator.

Learning Support

The Third Age Trust is always seeking ways to support learning in u3as. The Third Age Trust also encourages local networks to plan for the support of group leaders and offer support to help them fulfil these plans.

Online Courses

A list of courses is available on the website. Some have been written by u3a members in the UK, some are from Australia. Although these courses may be followed individually, the material may also be used by groups. Tutored courses cost £15 and run for eight weeks with the work done via email or online. Untutored courses cost £8 and can be downloaded and printed for group study. Courses offered by the Open University on 'Open Learn' are being tried and moderated, as necessary, for u3a use. Comment on their usefulness is welcomed and volunteers to write or trial courses are always needed. u3a online courses are of a high standard. They were awarded the Fred Moore Trophy for contribution to the 'Older and Bolder' project in 2007 by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

Research Collection

The research collection is a reference point for :-

a) research about older learners

b) research by older learners, including u3a members, on any subject This is currently being built up and information would be welcomed. Some u3a members have undertaken research as part of higher degrees or as part of their professional work and access to their papers would be particularly welcome. In the first instance please send details (i.e. title, author, any public source and date) to the Resource Centre Manager, marked clearly 'Research Collection'.

Shared Learning Projects

A Shared Learning Project is bounded by neither individual u3a s nor by any single institution. A typical Shared Learning Project is based on an institution, a gallery, museum etc. Members from many u3a s meet with a representative of the institution, often the Education Officer, and agree a project of mutual benefit. Timing, method and outcome are agreed. The result of this team research is presented as appropriate, which might mean orally or in written form, and to the institution or to the public. Reports on some of the projects to date can be read in 'Sources' and on the website. These cooperative opportunities offer an exciting future for sharing expertise and learning. In the first instance contact your local Third Age Trust trustee to see what is happening in your area and then the trustee (or if in London the contact) for Shared Learning Projects. If you start a Shared Learning Project please remember to register it at National Office.

Summer Schools

The Third Age Trust offers members a chance to spend four days studying in a residential setting. National Summer Schools are run every year and they have proved popular. The courses are usually subject based, and many group contacts attend on behalf of their group and return to them with material and a fresh outlook. They are, typically, on a college campus and the tutors are themselves u3a members. A list of courses available at Summer Schools is published each year in the preceding autumn, as a direct mailing, in Third Age Matters and on the website. The cost is dependent largely on accommodation.

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