

Interest Group Leaders Handbook

Baddow and Galleywood u3a

Purpose

The IGL handbook provides advice and support based on common practice. Some of the web links in this document will direct you to the main u3a website which is available to all members.

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.

Interest groups are central to u3as, 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 to be supportive and enable 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 who are no longer in full time employment.
- Members of a u3a promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a u3a.
- Members of a u3a should do all they can to ensure that everyone who wishes to join a u3a can do so.

The Self-Help Learning principle:

- Members of a u3a form interest groups, covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire. These are run *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 group members and leaders; they are all equal members of a u3a.

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 guiding principles of the u3a movement.
- No payments are made to members for services to any u3a.
- Each u3a is self-funded with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.

The first steps to forming a new group

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

- Agree your group with the Interest Groups Organiser who can support you with ideas.
- Check out interest in the group perhaps by speaking to other members at a monthly meeting or asking for feedback in a newsletter.
- You could contact neighbouring u3as to see if they have a similar subject group and talk to their Group Leader. Try and sit in on a group meeting.
- Additionally, there is a list of different Subject Advisers on the [u3a website](#).
- Generate interest by promoting your group using as many different methods as possible. This could include a flyer, poster, promotion via existing groups, via your u3a newsletter, sharing at a monthly meeting and talking to members in groups that you attend. The more methods you use, the more successful you are likely to be.
- Consider the suitability and cost of your chosen venue.
- Liaise with the Interest Groups Organiser/Treasurer No 2 account regarding the financing of the group and how this needs to be managed and reported and what accounts you need to keep
- Organise an initial meeting and invite those who have expressed an interest to attend. You might want to offer a 'taster session'
- Membership of groups is restricted to current and affiliate members only. If you are in doubt about a members status, please seek help from committee.

Suggested steps for the first meeting:

- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the group as you see it.
- Find out about the skills and experience within the group.
- Agree the tasks that need doing to run the group. Who is willing to help with developing the programme or keeping the register, taking money, putting out chairs, tables and making refreshments?
- You might want to ask someone else to assist you in Leading the group - to share the load!
- Agree how the group will work – discussion, instruction, presentation etc.
- Agree when, how often and where the group will run.
- Identify any accessibility needs that group members may have. Refer to the information on the [national u3a website](#) for advice and guidance.
- Agree the costs for running the group and what members will pay. You should keep this as low as possible. All groups are self-financing
- Use Beacon email for your communication with your group members. (This is a legal GDPR requirement) Our Beacon Administrator will help set this up for you.
- Agree some ground rules e.g.
 - Be punctual
 - Listen to each other and allow others to speak
 - Let someone know if you are unable to come
 - Agree to disagree amicably and be respectful to other group members
 - Have patience and encourage everyone

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

Participative learning and learning styles

The value of the u3a style of learning is that everyone can contribute.

These are some suggestions of how to make your group engaging and exciting by mixing the methods and opportunities for learning:

- **A visiting speaker:** A one-off visiting paid speaker or someone from another interest group or u3a.
- **Group member presentations:** A short presentation by a member of the group or a member leading the meeting on a specific topic.
- **Discussion groups:** Some activities will lead to discussion e.g. 'What is AI all about?', 'What is good art – and why?'
- **Project or theme based:** A project or theme chosen by the members. Each person (or pair) decide what to bring to the group.
- **Practical work:** making or creating something, a photoshoot,
- **Liaise with a school or community group:** e.g. local history presentation, art exhibition, or even a debate.
- **Research:** There may be organisations in your own area that you can partner with for a project.
- **Study workshops:** Plan one for your own members or as part of a local network.
- **Online learning:** there may be some free courses available. See [National u3a learning activities and events](#)

Group Leaders role & responsibilities

- Make any necessary arrangements for your groups meetings
- Use Beacon to communicate with members - inform them of meeting dates, times, venues and costs
- Keep an attendance register at meetings. This is mandatory for public liability insurance purposes.
- Reply to any enquiries which may come via the website (your name is linked to a contact form but your email address is hidden)
- Keep your webpage current and up to date - contact the webmaster to change or add anything.
- Manage the groups finances. Ensure income, payments and expenses records are kept for annual audit by Treasurer No 2 account. (See Groups Finance policy)

Sharing information

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

- On our Baddow and Galleywood u3a website
- In the bi-monthly News Round Up newsletter
- At the General Meeting

Policies and procedures

Your committee and/or Interest Groups Organiser 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 (we have a separate account set up for groups to manage money)
- Data protection (our u3a uses Beacon to store all member information)
- Safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion, Accessibility, risks.
- Complaints
- Incident reporting

There is also more information on the [Support for u3as](#) section of the u3a website.

Copyright

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Problem solving

Sometimes issues can arise within a group that disrupt the smooth running and can spoil the enjoyment for everyone. Don't leave a problem too long before trying to resolve it. Talk to your Interest Groups Organiser or committee if you are unsure how to resolve the problem or just want someone to explore options with.

Issues between group members

If a member's behaviour is frequently disturbing other members of the group and you feel comfortable dealing with the issue in the first instance, then you can do so. It is advisable to bring any friction into the open. Either you or another person could try and discuss either with the members concerned or with the whole group. If you cannot reach a resolution informally speak to your Interest Groups Organiser or a member of your committee. If a situation does not resolve and becomes acrimonious your committee may need to implement their disciplinary policy.

Other issues you may encounter:

- If there is a very serious problem in a session, it may be necessary to ask a member to leave for the remainder of the session. If this occurs please contact the Interest Groups Organiser as soon as possible after the end of the session.
- If you have member who is not able to cope independently, inform the Interest Groups Organiser as soon as possible to discuss how best to resolve this situation.

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 the [incident form](#) available on the Baddow and Galleywood

website. It is important to have an accurate record in case of future problems relating to the incident, e.g. an insurance claim might follow damage caused to property by a member of the group so full details are needed. The Third Age Trust provides public liability insurance for group activities, and although personal accident insurance cover is not provided, the insurance does cover all u3a members. Further details (including excess levels) can be found on the [u3a website](#).

Our Beacon system holds members emergency contact details that have been provided. You can access these on your groups page on Beacon.

Log book

You may wish to keep a log book. It could include:

- Registers
- Venue, timing, costs
- Accounts where relevant
- Materials and support available
- Local information

Need a little extra help?

National help and support for u3as - Resources

- **Subject Advisers** are Trust Volunteers who can provide advice on both the setting up of a group of their subject area and the sustainability of ones already in existence.. Their contact details are available on the [u3a website](#).
- [u3a Subject networks](#) provide a platform for u3a members to connect and come together around their interests.
- **u3a subject events** are an opportunity to share resources and ideas, as well as access help setting up a group within your u3a. These can be found on the u3a website under [Learning events](#).
- [Networks, regions and neighbouring u3as](#) allow you to draw on experience from within the movement. To stay up to date with everything Networks-related, sign up to our [News for Network Mailings](#).
- [u3a website](#), in particular the support for u3as section
- [u3a friends newsletter](#) is a monthly e-newsletter, which can be subscribed to by members and non-u3a members on the [u3a website](#).
- [The u3a office](#) can be contacted by any member if you have questions, need advice or have concerns. Email: u3a.office@u3a.org.uk or telephone: 020 8466 6139
- **External organisations** such as museums, libraries, schools, universities.

Third Age Trust Workshops

The u3a office and Trust Volunteer Trainers run online workshops called 'Interest Group Matters' which covers additional information to this handbook. The workshops also provide an opportunity to meet other u3a members from across the country. More information can be found on the [u3a workshops page](#).