

1. Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to provide advice and support to Interest Group Leaders.

The handbook is based on common practice.

The title 'Group Leader' is used in this guide as it is the one most commonly used by members. However, people who help to create interest groups are known by many names. You might be a Group Leader, Facilitator, Convener, Manager, Organiser, Coordinator.

Related Documents

Documents are for your use and can be found on Alnwick u3a website. These can be found in the 'Contact' section. The documents include:

Data Protection Policy

Policy Statement on Vulnerable Adults

Complaints Procedure

Safeguarding Policy and Procedure

Risk Assessment checklists

2. 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 information 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 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.

3. u3a Principles

The u3a ethos is based on three principles:

3.1 The Third Age Principle:

- Membership of a u3a is open to all who are no longer in full-time gainful employment.
- 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

3.2 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

3.3 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.

4. The first steps to forming a new group

Recommended steps to undertake:

- Agree the development of your Group with the Groups Coordinator
- Liaise with the Groups Coordinator and Treasurer concerning any financial issues concerning the group.
- Consider what interest there might be in the subject perhaps by some informal soundings.
- 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. It can also be mentioned with a sign up list, at the Monthly Meeting, either by you or the Groups Coordinator. The more methods you use, the more successful you are likely to be.
- Decide the type of venue best suited for your Group. Liaise with the Groups Coordinator regarding day/time available in St Michael's Hall, arrange another venue at your cost or use a Members home.
- 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. If you're unsure or want further advice speak with your Group Coordinator or Committee. Identify what you want to achieve from your first meeting.
- Organise an initial meeting and invite people to attend.

5. First Meeting

- Take the names of everyone at your meeting and keep a register. At the end of the year the Membership Secretary will ask you to send a list of all of these members.
- If there is a tea and coffee break and money is taken from the members, after restocking, any surplus money is to be sent to the Treasurer by the end of July to go into the Alnwick u3a Funds.