

## **The Deepings u3a Information for Group Leaders - Running an Interest Group**

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 document 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.

### **u3a Principles**

The u3a ethos is based on three principles

- 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. As a u3a member, we can learn as part of a group, sharing experiences and explaining our understanding to others.

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, non-paid tutor 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 the papers say', 'Which way does water go down the plug hole – and why?'
- Project based: A project chosen by the members. Each person (or pair) allocated an area of research which they bring to the group. This can be a good way to learn new technology.
- Practical work: This might lean towards specific subjects such as science, craft, photography, creative writing, storytelling.
- Drama: Create a short sketch and provide some entertainment for your monthly meeting.
- Themes: Have an event or presentation linked to a specific topic.

Some members may feel that they want to broaden the scope of their interests and opportunities for this could be:-

- Liaise with a school or community group: e.g. local history presentation, art exhibition, debate.
- Research and Shared Learning Projects: These are opportunities to work on short term projects with other u3as or outside organisations. They usually involve some type of research and have a definite outcome.
- Study days and workshops: Plan one for your own members or as part of a local network. e.g., family history day, language day, story-telling workshop, debate, quiz, music.
- Online learning: e.g., MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses) are free courses on Future Learn.
- Regional Summer Schools: Speak to your Regional Team for information about any plans they may have. Many of these are open to any member, not just members within the corresponding region

### **The first steps to forming 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/u3a committee.
- Liaise with the Groups Coordinator/Treasurer regarding the financing of the group and how this needs to be reported.
- Consider what interest there might be in the subject perhaps by speaking to other members at a monthly meeting or asking for feedback in a newsletter.
- 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? There is a list of all Subject Advisers on the u3a website. An alternative could be to contact neighbouring u3as to see if they have a similar subject group and talking to their Group Leader. It may also be possible for you to 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 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.

- You should consider whether there are any risks that might occur as a result of the group's activities. Download the relevant Risk Assessment checklist(s) to help you identify any and talk to the Groups Coordinator who will advise you on risk assessment procedures. If you're unsure or want further advice to speak with your committee.
- 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 Group Leader's Handbook on The Deepings u3a website.

### **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 the skills and experience within the 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, 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.
- Identify any accessibility needs that group members may have. Refer to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion information on The Deepings u3a website.
- 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 guidance (e.g. always using the BCC function on emails to avoid sharing addresses between all members) and always seek permission and agreement. Refer to the Privacy Policy on The Deepings u3a website.