

Information for Group Convenors/Leaders

Introduction

There are as many ways of approaching the establishment and running of groups as there are people to run them. Some groups benefit from expert input whilst others rely on input or participation from all the group members. The Group Convenor can be an expert or simply an administrator. A group may rely on non book material from the Resource Centre.

Role of Group Leader Coordinators

The Groups Coordinator's role is to help and support existing group convenors and to help set up new groups. They can also liaise between and with the committee about any issues of principle or policy. They can provide practical advice on finding a suitable venue and obtaining source material. New groups should “register” with the Groups Coordinator to ensure their group is covered by U3A insurance and other benefits.

Timetabling

Each group will wish to determine its own meeting times, though these should be chosen to allow the greatest possible participation. The Groups Coordinator keeps an outline diary (also on the web site) which sets out when all the groups meet. This can be helpful in determining the best day and time for a group to meet to avoid clashes. Most groups meet once a month in a regular slot such as the second Tuesday or fourth Wednesday, but some groups meet more regularly. Some groups only meet in summer and others take a break in summer.

Where to meet

Exeter U3A groups meet in a number of formal and informal venues, e.g. The Mint, the Palace Gate Centre and at Wetherspoons on South Street. Some of these venues charge for the meetings and the authority of the Secretary, in consultation with the Treasurer, is required before rooms are booked. The Groups Coordinator can help with this. Many groups meet in members' houses, though this does tend to limit the numbers who can attend. Other groups require access to technical equipment (e.g. projectors, DVD players etc.) which can only be found at certain venues.

Where groups meet in members' houses, it is especially important for group members to let the host and group convenor know if they are going to attend a meeting. This isn't just courtesy, but allows the host to plan seating arrangements and refreshments accordingly.

When meetings take place in members' houses and refreshments are provided, then group members are expected to contribute a minimum of 25p.

Location, Transport and Deposits

It is generally best if meetings are held centrally or at the homes of those on good public transport routes. The type of venue required may well depend upon the nature of the activity. Giving lifts without obligation can be useful. Exeter U3A's policy on contributions is that members should not pay more than their share of the out-of-pocket expenses of the driver. For example, the Out and About group convenor advises the cost to the driver of a vehicle for each trip, which can then be divided equally between the occupants of a car.

For some activities there is a charge or deposit payable in advance. Group Members should be reminded that these charges are usually not refundable if the member is not subsequently able to attend the event.

Communications

It is important that group convenors communicate with all existing and potential members of their group. There are a variety of mechanisms for this and the method chosen will depend on the style and knowledge of the group convenor. Email has become increasingly useful as it is a way of reaching most group members quickly and with a consistent written message. More recently the web site has been revamped and every group now has its own web page. Group Convenors can use this to keep their group members informed about the group's future activities, as well as communicating to the wider U3A what your group has done and proposes to do. Group Convenors (or a chosen member of the group) can be authorised to customise and update their web page or they can send information in the form of text and pictures directly to the web administrator who will do that for them.

Group Convenors must be aware that, when emailing group members, they should generally put all members addresses in the **Bcc:** field rather than the **To:** or **Cc:** fields. This protects the confidentiality that members are entitled to, as recipients will not be able to see each other's addresses. Of course, there is nothing to stop you asking members if they are happy for others to have their email address, but permission should always be obtained beforehand. If in any doubt about the "how-to" of this, please contact the Web Administrator (Groups).

But not everybody has easy access to a computer. Some people prefer to use the telephone and speak to group members. Advance notification of events can also be given through the bi-monthly newsletter, which should go to all members. This can be especially important for groups involved in visits. For some groups a telephone tree can help to ensure swift dissemination of information. The responsibility for communications needn't lie solely with the group convenor. Groups can identify another member of the group to be responsible for letting members' know the details of what, where and when things are happening. Alternatively, the onus might be put on the members to contact the group convenor to find the details of the next meeting.

It can be useful for Group leaders to give their group members their mobile telephone numbers, especially if the group visits various locations.

What is particularly important here is not relying on one method. Communication should be tailored to the individual's requirements to ensure nobody is excluded.

Registers and Membership

Group Convenors should check that all their members are members of Exeter U3A. This is particularly important

- when a new group is formed

- when new members join

- in June (after the grace period for renewing membership has expired).

Current membership is important to ensure that all attendees are covered by U3A insurance which protect members, convenors and the U3A in the event of accidents.

Important note: the Insurance issued to us by National covers U3A and members for any litigation brought by a registered member because of proven negligence. It is **not** Individual Accident Cover.

Exceptions to the requirement for membership are made for

- non-members of Exeter U3A attending a single meeting of a single group as a "trial"

- existing members who have not yet renewed their membership for the current year – within two months of the renewal date.

Members of other U3As may attend a single group as a visitor. If they attend a number of groups they must join Exeter U3A but may do so as an Associate Member at a reduced fee. In order to ensure that the latter rule is followed it is important to record and report all attendances by non-members of Exeter U3A.

Group Convenors should take a register of attendees at each group meeting. This is particularly important where a fee is being paid to book a venue. The committee will want to be sure that it is achieving good value for money from the subscriptions paid by members. It also provides a method of checking that all group members are fully paid up members of Exeter U3A.

Registers are also useful to note a prolonged absence so that the group convenor can contact the absentee and ascertain the reason. This is especially relevant if the Group Convenor has a waiting list.

Resource Centre

The Third Age Trust has an enormous collection of resources at its headquarters in Bromley. These can be lent to groups to help in their learning and sometimes obviate the need for an expert to lead the group.

Size of Groups and Managing Waiting Lists

Some groups, especially those that meet in members' homes have to be restricted in size. Inevitably in some cases this leads to instances where demand exceeds supply. In these cases the group convenor might set up a waiting list. Alternatively, consideration could be given to setting up a second group.

Other groups, where there is no upper limit on numbers, often get very large, but with many inactive members. In these cases group convenors are recommended to review the membership periodically, contacting those members who they have not seen or heard from to see if they wish to continue in the group.

Health & Safety

Some groups' activities involve visits to places – gardens, places of architectural interest, out and about. In these cases it is important to pay attention to Health & Safety. Group Convenors should advise any group members of any difficulties or potential hazards they know about for those with mobility or health problems. The newsletter includes a short paragraph on the need for group members to **take responsibility for their own safety**.

A reminder that the Insurance issued to us by National is **not** Individual Accident Cover.

Members of groups are advised, especially where they are going to an outside activity, to carry an emergency telephone number on them (though this should not be their own number if they live alone!) so that group convenors are able to contact someone in the event of an emergency.

In the unlikely event of an accident the Group Convenor must complete an accident form within 24 hours of the incident. A copy of this is attached or it can be obtained from the Group Coordinators or the Secretary. If the Group Convenor thinks it is appropriate, it might be prudent to obtain a witness statement at the same time, even though there is space on the form for the names and addresses of two witnesses.

New Groups

If a Member, the Groups Coordinator and/or the committee detect a demand for a new group, then the simplest way to establish one is to advertise the proposed group in the newsletter or ask the Group Leaders' Coordinator to mention it in their report. Alternatively the Group Leaders' Coordinator can announce the intention to set up a group at the general meeting and then to circulate a sheet of paper asking for interest. If there are sufficient numbers then the Groups Coordinator or a potential group convenor will set up an initial meeting to establish the range and purpose of group, when and where it will meet etc. All new groups should be "registered" with the Group Leader Coordinators to ensure they are covered by U3A insurance and receive local support.