

Making Your u3a Offer Irresistible



u3as have been sharing ideas with each other and coming up with resources to help the movement retain and recruit members during this time and beyond. This series hosts the new resources (toolkit) for u3a members to use when needed. Credit: Frances Berry and Paul Martinez

Introduction

The purpose of the guide is to suggest how you can make your vital interest group offer irresistible to current and potential new members.

Success breeds success. New groups are vital to the growth of a u3a. Diversity will increase membership which will increase the pool of expertise to start more groups. Many members join for the social aspect of groups.... Waiting lists for groups are addressed and there are non-attendance rules. Arun East u3a

Your experiences of using this guide are of vital importance. Please email suggestions for improvement to feedback@u3a.org.uk.

Getting your existing groups going

This is a delicate exercise of a number of your skills, including but not limited to persuasion, inspiration, technical support, and negotiation.

This section of the guide is inspired by the experience of one of the Nottingham u3as, so it has been tested in practice. Beeston u3a restarted over 50 of its 80 groups by June 2020. They used a mixture of:

- Encouragement to use Zoom
- Technical support and help sheets
- Trial zoom sessions
- Promotion of all active groups through the u3a newsletter and website.

Hybrid interest groups

No, this isn't about gardening! Hybrid interest groups mix and match face to face meetings and/or individual activity with online meetings. The concept has been developed for u3a by Liz Thackray. Her paper Hybrid Groups develops and explains the concept with a number of practical examples. Liz's paper can be found by opening [this link](#).

There are a wide range of situations which will require different types of hybrid group. Your u3a will, we are sure, develop new and innovative hybrid interest groups to suit your members and your interest groups.

“In some situations, this hybrid model might be as simple as a small group meeting with a laptop in the corner with others joining in the discussion/activity electronically. In other situations, it might be something similar to a webcast with a live presentation being simultaneously streamed through Zoom, YouTube, or other means and possibly recorded for later consumption. Other options may apply to outdoor activities, music making, drama, sport, etc. The options will be determined by a number of factors including the nature of the activity, technical know-how of participants, willingness to experiment, etc. – and some activities are more challenging than others.”

Examples of hybrid meetings would include:

- Committee meeting with some members in a socially distanced, face to face meeting and joining others on Zoom projected on to a wall or perhaps cast to a tv screen
- Creating a Radical History group from scratch where members independently followed a FutureLearn course: Radical British History from Peterloo to the Suffragettes. The group met via zoom to share reactions, discuss and indeed critique the course. (More on this type of hybrid group in the next section on Starting New Interest Groups.)
- An opera appreciation group where members independently watch an agreed opera from a free streaming platform (eg Operavision) and meet fortnightly to discuss the opera and introduce the next opera using YouTube video clips.
- A creative writing group which meetings in a leisure centre but which shares and critiques members' work online

- A French conversation class which meets on zoom. Between the fortnightly meetings, a member will email a vocabulary list on an agreed topic, or members agree to watch a clip from YouTube to discuss at the next zoom meeting.
- Virtual guided tours – the example given was a tour of the Wallace Collection. This can be done real time and also recorded for later viewing [example courtesy Liz Thackray]
- A Film group where members watch a film which has been selected at the previous meeting. Members watch the film independently on a free streaming platform (e.g. iPlayer or All4) and discuss the film at a follow up meeting. At the follow-up meeting they will also watch trailers for the films from which they will make their choice to watch before the next meeting (more information below in section on Starting New Interest Groups).
- A poetry group where one member cannot access the zoom meeting and where she is joined by a ‘zoom buddy’ who joins both of them to the meeting.

Starting new interest groups

This might seem a bit ambitious but being forced to adapt to a Covid-19 world has suggested all sorts of possibilities for new groups, without a large amount of extra work.

We are all experimenting with different approaches. There seem to be at least 4 main approaches at the moment which seek to take advantage of the opportunities of our pandemic world:

- Developing a new group on the basis of an existing group
- Sharing a group across two or more u3as
- Developing a new group using online resources
- Starting a new group to follow a FREE course that someone else has designed.

As an example of a new group for old, one u3a’s Wine tasting group used to meet monthly in a community hall to taste between 6 and 10 wines. The hall has not reopened and instead of a tasting group, the u3a has opened a Raise Your Glass group which meets via Zoom. Members describe the single wine they are drinking and details of source, cost etc. The Zooms are themed, and the convenor will show a couple of short videos on the theme of the meeting. Joke telling, conversation and a certain amount of hilarity ensue.

Given that the constraints of space, time and travel have been abolished on the internet, some u3as are sharing some or all of their online interest groups, which can of course be included in the offer of each u3a which has agreed to share.

Carlton and Gedling u3a never had a Film Group before Covid19. But with cinemas and theatres being closed, it started one. It meets twice a month to watch a film agreed at the previous meeting. To keep the programme interesting, film selection alternates: a classic film from the history of cinema in one meeting and in the next, a fairly recent or contemporary film. Films have been studied from a variety of free streaming platforms, notably iPlayer, All4 and YouTube.

The advantage of these streaming platforms is that members don't all have to watch the film at the same time, the films are available to anyone with a smart tv, internet connection or cable subscription....AND THEY'RE FREE. People study the film at their leisure in the two weeks between meetings.

The fourth approach is to create an interest group to follow a course or courses which have been designed and created by someone else. One of the best-known sources for courses is FutureLearn. The Open University also offers a wide range of courses across different subjects.

It's extremely easy to create a new interest group to agree a course that members want to follow and exchange ideas and discuss the course via email, WhatsApp or Zoom.

The course developed by somebody else could form the basis for a whole new study group, which might be able to meet in the flesh or adopt a hybrid approach when the lockdown has eased or ended.

Using other people's content has all sorts of benefits. Notably, it:

- can create a shared and enjoyable learning experience
- widens the scope and range of interest groups and enriches your interest group offer
- gets over the problem of lacking sufficient expertise to start a new interest group
- takes the burden of preparation off the group convenor
- is potentially attractive to the newly and recently retired.

To expand on the last point, the u3a nationally recently commissioned a survey of 500 over-55-year-olds, only a handful of whom were u3a members. Around half of the respondents said they were interested in learning new subjects and skills when they retired and had more time AND they had pretty good IT skills and said they would be looking for opportunities online. For more information about this survey, see the separate Market Research Report in the Toolkit.

Sharing interest groups with other u3as

Sharing interest groups across u3as may sound like a hassle but there are many benefits from sharing interest groups:

- at a stroke it enriches and extends the interest group, both your own and that of each participating u3a
- it extends your offer particularly to the potentially and newly retired (and more internet-savvy) new members
- since the interest group is mainly or wholly online, there is little or no implied cost in terms of time, effort or money
- it will reinforce and promote partnership links between u3as, particularly if you are geographically close

Many u3as have developed different models for sharing interest groups between different u3as. In Nottinghamshire, for example, there are a spectrum of arrangements from very informal to very formal.

At the informal end, an interest group in one u3a is advertised in another, often to boost small numbers.

At the formal end, the North Nottinghamshire Neighbourhood Network of u3as has a constitution and officers; member u3as allow and encourage members of other u3as in the Network to join their interest groups without charge. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum there are u3as which have established bilateral arrangements between 2, 3 or 4 u3as, which allow members from one u3a to join an interest group in another.

In an unexpected way, the arrival of social distancing has removed some of the barriers to sharing interest groups. If groups are meeting online or operating hybrid arrangements, for example, there may no longer be a limit on group numbers imposed by venue size. After all, it doesn't really make much difference whether your Zoom meeting has 5, 15 or 25 members attending. You just need to have a slightly more formal structure and agreed ways of not all talking at once, as you get larger numbers.

Other barriers which have come tumbling down are time and space. Until now, the wider the geographical spread of membership of an interest group meeting face to face, the more distance members have had to travel to a meeting and the more time they have had to spend. Online, these barriers fall away.

Managing your truly irresistible interest group offer

You will need to have in place a willing, capable friendly team to support your Interest Group Co-ordinator – or an extremely busy Coordinator – as you are developing and adapting your whole interest group offer for Covid-world.

Get up close to your members and listen to what they want/would like. Consider sending a survey to all your members to find out who, what, when and how they may start new groups. Survey Monkey is free and easy to use. Develop a culture of having a go: if a group stops or doesn't take off then it's an opportunity to start another!

To recruit the newly retired, the offering must appeal to them. They are looking for sport activities, dancing, mindfulness, Tai Chi, family history, and things to resume or new things to learn such as musical instruments, sewing/ craft skills and languages. Have a look at the market research. Check you have a good range of these on offer and try to fill gaps.

Check your website. If a prospective member googles, for example 'gardening' in your area, chances are Google will take them to your gardening group's page. Is it up to date? Is it attractive? Does it just say 'closed until further notice....' What is the message on your welcome page?

What images are you using? Do they sell the benefits of your u3a to your intended new members? See the How to guide in the toolkit: Transforming your website.

Waiting lists will have a strongly negative impact on potential new members, so actively set up parallel and complementary groups to eliminate them. For example, if Family History is full then try a “Writing your family history” group or use FutureLearn courses on genealogy as a course lead for discussion in a Zoom meeting.

Have a handbook ready for a new group leader, plus an informed ‘helper’ if the prospective leader is new to u3a. Groups do not need an expert, a leader or a teacher. For more information about the many ways groups can work download a copy of ‘More time to learn’ from the National u3a office.

Finally, when you start recruitment, be ready to match up your new members to existing groups and have a robust plan ready for creating new groups for the age of Covid (e.g. online groups, a buddy system for those without access to suitable IT, venues suitable for socially distanced inside and outside meetings).

Case Study:

Beeston u3a getting interest groups to reopen

“Our two group coordinators have been very active in contacting interest group facilitators to see if there’s anything they can do to support them in continuing some activity. We’ve sent out information about using Zoom to help them.

Help sheets have been sent out to those who showed interest. Anne and Kathy did quite a bit of work by contacting group leaders personally and getting them started on Zoom by running trial sessions. It’s finding a balance between pressurising and supporting. Some group leaders haven’t responded but many have and it’s really good to see. I think the listing in our bulletin helped to show how many groups are active and encouraged others. As at September 2020, there are 29 groups meeting online and 27 groups meeting face to face either outside or in socially distanced venues. Obviously, it was also very encouraging to feature stories and reports from some of the groups meeting via zoom.

Reports from online groups are given below to give a flavour of what we’re doing.

American History

We were treated to an interesting talk on the History of the American Flag, with lots of visuals and videos to illustrate the talk. Zoom meetings has been working well for us, as long as we have speakers who can deal with the technology. It is not like being in a room together, with questions generally waiting until the end. But it’s enabling us to continue with our interest in American History (and politics) and we are therefore continuing like this until the New Year. Next month, we will have another talk about previous contentious elections.

Art History and Appreciation Group

Our theme for September is “Weather in Art”. Members are researching and sharing pieces of art on this theme. So far, we have shared paintings by John Atkinson Grimshaw, Joseph Farquharson, Victor Gabriel Gilbert, Claude Monet, and Vincent Van Gogh. There are plenty of delights still to come. New members welcome- please contact me on groups@beestonu3a.org.uk to be added to the group list.

There is no pressure on new members to contribute when they first join- they can simply enjoy others’ choices.

Some groups won’t touch Zoom, so it depends on a flexible approach from the leader. I run a play reading group and I haven’t tried due to the struggle of all sharing a script to read, and of course the activity and games groups have also not done anything. It very much depends on the nature of the interest group.

Our monthly open meetings are now taking place on Zoom where our Chair can make announcements and we have a guest speaker who can take questions at the end, either verbally or through the Chat facility on Zoom. We have a full programme of speakers up to June 2021 and we have capacity for up to 500 members to attend. Members are learning how to use Zoom so that more of them will be able to participate as time goes on.

We do what we can in trying times! Our older members will be the last ones to come out to meetings when we finally get the go ahead, and they are often the ones without email as well! I posted something out to them about the AGM, but I think u3as that set about telephoning people are doing a great job. We didn’t expect this to go on so long!”

– Communications officer, Beeston u3a

7 Steps to Recruiting More Group Leaders



u3as have been sharing ideas with each other and coming up with resources to help the movement retain and recruit members during this time and beyond. This series hosts the new resources (toolkit) for u3a members to use when needed.

Interest group convenors are also called leaders, organisers, tutors, facilitators, contacts, enablers and no doubt a host of other names. Here they are referred to as convenors.

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to outline 7 steps to getting more interest group convenors.

“Ha!” you may think, “We’ve been working at this for x years and it’s getting more difficult all the time! And it’s not just u3a: it’s getting more difficult for all voluntary organisations.”

This may be true, but some u3as seem quite successful in recruiting convenors and this guide suggests a step-by-step process based firmly on their experiences.

Your experiences of using the guide are of vital importance. Please keep a note of your suggestions for improvement and send them to feedback@u3a.org.uk.

The Seven Steps

These steps have been created from the experiences of over 40 u3as which successfully grew their membership over several years before the arrival of Covid19. Not every u3a took every step, but most of them took several. This guide synthesizes the steps they took.

The steps are:

1. Set up your team
2. Agree your approaches
3. Sell the benefits
4. Offer different levels of commitment
5. Create support
6. Encourage succession planning
7. Define the problem

It might seem a bit bizarre to define the problem at the end. We have adopted this order because the first six steps seem to be generally applicable to recruiting more group convenors, but the general approach will need to be fine-tuned to the specific issues you are addressing.

Step 1: Set up your team

You will need a willing, enthusiastic, capable and friendly team to support your interest group co-ordination role (or an extremely busy [not to mention heroic] Interest Group Coordinator), because you are developing and adapting your whole interest group offer for our current and evolving context. Some u3as have established a small team or a sub-committee to support their Interest Groups Coordinator. Some have created two or more co-ordinators

Step 2: Agree your approaches: hot, cold or warm?

How are you going to approach potential convenors? There are all sorts of ways from hot to cold. Hot implies a quite intensive personal approach to someone you know. It is obviously demanding of your group coordinator's time – another reason to adopt a team approach! Perhaps you will meet 1:2:1 over a drink and you will make your sales pitch.

“Instead of waiting for volunteers we approach individuals personally to become convenors of second and third groups e.g. Bridge, Reading Groups. These may be existing or new members.” – Windsor u3a

At the other end of the spectrum a very cold approach implies no interpersonal interaction at all, such as a call in your newsletter for volunteers or a request made in the course of your general meeting or a general email from your Chair.

The good news is that cold approaches don't take up much time or effort, but there is much anecdotal evidence that they aren't very effective either. Somewhere in the middle are warm approaches, e.g.

- Finding out about the interests of a new member as part of your welcome and induction process and exploring ways in which the new member might not only join existing groups but start a new one of their own. Anecdotally, in mature u3as a significant number of new groups are started by new members.
- Inviting all your members to a meeting – probably online at the moment – where they can perhaps chat over a coffee about groups they would like to see develop and you can spot potential 'talent'
- Surveying your members about groups they would like to see and convening meetings of those who show an interest in a specific group. This might sound like a lot of work (another reason for a team approach) but using a tool like SurveyMonkey really makes surveys easy. It's free and you can teach yourself how to use it in less than an hour.
- Encouraging/supporting/inspiring/persuading your current group convenors to recruit deputy and associate convenors and to share out tasks in the group among group members. It shares some of the burden of running the group, and helpers and deputy convenors can become convenors of the future. It also provides cover if the group convenor is "absent" because of holiday, illness, or clashing commitments. For more on this approach, see Step 4 below.

Step 3: Sell the benefits

A general principle of selling – and you are trying to sell the idea of convenorship – is that you promote the benefits rather than describe the duties, available support etc. Benefits come in all shapes and sizes but here they can probably be sub-divided into immediate personal benefits and benefits to your u3a

Personal and immediate benefits would include:

- Making new and deeper friendships – nothing bonds people together like a shared endeavour
- Finding a group of enthusiasts who want to share and explore the potential convenor's own interests, hobbies and dare we say, obsessions! A shared interest is more gratifying and satisfying than one pursued on your own.
- Learning a new skill – in the present context your new convenor will be developing a variety of technical and interpersonal skill (for more on technical skills see below)
- Acquiring new knowledge – there's nothing like facilitating or leading a discussion, sharing learning and negotiating and selecting the subjects for discussion, let alone preparing a presentation to help you, nay force you, to acquire new knowledge.
- Doing new things – if someone has never convened a group before it's a very useful experience to have at whatever age

- Experimenting and taking risks – u3a members are the nicest people, interest groups are an ideal and supportive context to try new things, push your boundaries, challenge yourself a bit, but in a safe way.
- Benefits to your u3a may appeal to some potential convenors who are willing to look beyond their subject. Benefits would include:
 - More opportunities for members
 - A deeper and richer offer to inspire potential new members
 - Relieve any capacity issues for any current groups
 - Ensure that a group continues when a long-standing convenor retires

Step 4 Offer different levels of commitment

A perfect or ideal u3a might be one where every single member is contributing a bit – however small – to the u3a. This is ambitious, but there is no question most people would rather make a commitment to a smallish task in a well-defined context than take on what looks like a huge task, and one which has to be developed and delivered from scratch.

There seem to be two principles here. In the words of the u3a National advice sheet Recruiting and Valuing Volunteers, share out the duties between members.

A co-leader or deputy can help in the event of absence (illness or holidays) and a facilitator can book the room, sort out the money etc, allowing the convenor to concentrate on his/her main function within the group.

“We have group co-ordinators not group leaders – most groups have pairs or a team who divide or share co-ordination tasks” – Dronfield u3a

“When we started, around half the membership expressed an interest in going on trips to local theatres or concert halls. The idea languished. A couple of meetings were held but no one was willing to take on the role of group convenor. At a third meeting (where numbers had dwindled to 8 people), the interest group coordinator facilitated a discussion where people loosened up a bit by describing their interests and hopes for the group. In answer to the \$64,000 question, about what they might contribute to make it happen, most people said they would be happy to organise a theatre outing if they could do so with another person. A couple of years later, the theatre planning group of 7 was meeting 4 or 5 times a year to create a programme, every member of the planning group was comfortable organising outings on their own, and the u3a was offering over 40 outings each year.” – Carlton and Gedling u3a

The second principle is to encourage group members to participate, help out and make presentations etc. This can help to create a group culture where everyone pulls together. It will also avoid the convenor being seen as irreplaceable.

Step 5: Create support

In preCovid-19 days, most u3as seem to have developed a fairly comprehensive package of support for convenors, including a guidance manual of some kind, a list of available venues, regular meetings of all convenors, ways of collecting monies if necessary and ways of making payments, together with periodic updates and news from the interest group coordinator. Many u3as have also subscribed to Beacon which, among its other virtues, make the administration of an interest group so much easier.

“The group co-ordinator holds regular meetings with [convenors] to discuss and share ideas. Where there are groups with vacancies there is a group sharing arrangement with other local u3as. This increases the opportunity for members. They are open to new interest groups starting and have an agreement to prime fund some start-ups, for example with paying for licences and helping with the initial venue rental with the expectation that the group will become self-sufficient. They also encourage members of the interest group to take the lead when the facilitator is unavailable, in order for the group to occur.” – Waltham Abbey u3a

At the moment, however, the greatest need for support seems to be technical as u3as seek to extend their online and hybrid interest group offer. For more about extending and enriching your interest group offer, see the How to guide: Making your offer irresistible.

Specific skills which your u3a might want to support and enhance might include:

- Getting the best from YouTube and the internet in terms of hand-holding, advice and perhaps online coaching in how to conduct internet searches, convert search outcomes into useable material and how to create YouTube playlists.
- Getting the best out of Zoom, especially using the screen-sharing facility and assisting group members to connect with Zoom for the first time
- Using Doodle Poll to set up meetings – this shows potential attendees a list of dates and times asks them which suit, then automatically consolidates their replies and identifies the best time and date to meet. Saves a lot of time!

Other suggestions from Recruiting and Valuing Volunteers are

- to identify group convenors who are willing to act as mentors to support new convenors in the early stages;
- share success stories by asking existing convenors to talk about positive experiences of taking on the role, such as the challenges that they overcame or the confidence they gained
- dispel any misconceptions about what being a convenor means. In particular, try to demystify the role and communicate that you do not need to be an expert in a particular field to run a group successfully.
- Refer to the small army of Subject Advisors who are available, via the national u3a website, to support group convenors in a wide range of subject areas.

Step 6: Encourage succession planning

We have all heard tragic stories about the totally brilliant person who convened, may led, an exhilarating and stimulating interest group. When they retired after several years, no one was willing to take on the role and the group folded.

What's the message here? It's not that you don't want charismatic convenors! The message is that some succession arrangements made early in the life of the group should make life easier – even for the charismatic convenor – and ensure that other members of the group are willing and able to take on more responsibility when a convenor retires.

The best, if not the only, way to make this happen is to encourage convenors to have a deputy or even a team to support the group.

“No interest group should be facilitated by a single person. This makes it easier to start a new group, welcome new members and continue the group in the longer term.” – Beeston u3a

“I am one of the committee of 6 or 7 running our garden group which has about 160 members (which I know shocks some people....) and it really is a shared endeavour which even has a little sub-group organising our garden holidays. It works very well and it's true – we have become friends with a shared interest and shared responsibilities making the whole endeavour much more fun. Better still we have one of our group who loves a spreadsheet!” – Sherburn and Villages u3a

The objections you might get from the charismatic convenor are ‘no one has offered’ or ‘it's easier and less hassle to do it all myself’. At the end of the day, you can't force someone to have a deputy but there are some quite strong arguments in favour:

- Have you asked anyone to do something for the group? Why not try now?
- After the initial investment in developing a deputy (or a team) it will make life easier for you and perhaps take away the parts of being a convenor that you don't really enjoy
- You will be developing the social and collaborative side of your group
- It's actually more fun.....it is, really
- You're developing potential successors and guaranteeing a long life for the group
- Well why don't you talk to xx and find out about how they've done it

If all else fails, perhaps you can persuade the group convenor to try a new arrangement for a period of time.

“Our Wine Tasting Group was getting a bit burdensome to convene after several years. The solution was to distribute the tasks within the group. Several members gained experience of running the tastings in the absence of the convenor. Set up & clear up groups were established. Someone else collected monies. Another couple bought the bread and cheese and yet another person collated and edited the tasting notes generated at each meeting and calculated the scores for each wine. When the group became too large for the accommodation, 2 helpers started a new group.” – Carlton and Gedling u3a.

Step 7: Define the problem

u3as are very diverse. Some have been established for many years; some are very recent. Some are urban, some rural; some are very large, others are small, with all shapes and sizes in between. Nevertheless issues around encouraging and recruiting interest group convenors seem to boil down into three main sorts:

- New groups: You have stopped forming new interest groups, or there aren't enough of them, or there are gaps in the range of interest groups you want to offer
- Succession: Current interest group convenor wants to stand down and no one in the group has offered to replace them
- Closed groups: Some of your interest groups are closed to new members either because of venue constraints or because the group feels that their operation would be impeded or undermined by new members.

The general strategy for each of these situations will be similar, but you might want to vary the emphasis you put on different steps in this 7 Step process.

In the event that the issue you are addressing is New groups, some general strategies to establish new groups are suggested in another How to guide: Making your u3a offer irresistible. In order to recruit new convenors for such groups, we would suggest placing a particular emphasis on 'Hot' and 'Warm' approaches, a very big sell on benefits and as much support as you can offer, tailored to the particular needs of the prospective convenor.

In order to resolve Succession issues, a particular emphasis might be placed on warm and hot approaches, selling the benefits to both the individual and the u3a – 'without you the group could fold' – and the possibilities of sharing the load, innovation and change. It's worth pausing over change and innovation.

If a group has run successfully by a convenor for several years, more or less single handed, the prospect of taking it on may seem especially daunting to a member of the group. It's really worth emphasizing that the group can evolve to suit both the new convenor(s) and the group. In other words the new team doesn't have to offer the same activities that the group may have got used to over several years.

"Our local history group nearly folded when the convenor stood down after a two-year stint which had involved a number of excellent presentations (by the convenor), some well organised local history walks (designed and led by the convenor) and an innovative shared learning project (animated and led by the convenor). In the event, two people came forward to share the convenor role and the group has evolved in a new direction (visits to local historic buildings and landmarks) with a larger membership." – Carlton and Gedling u3a

Closed groups seem to be a perennial and quite widespread problem. Many u3as make the most strenuous efforts to keep all their groups open, but experience intractable problems – e.g. venue size; well established friendship groups may have formed etc.

In general terms, there seems to be three main ways forward:

- Split the existing group
- Move to a new venue
- Start a new group

“Splitting the group might seem a bit drastic, but it can offer benefits. Assuming new convenors can be found for one of the groups (see above, New groups and Succession), the now two groups can meet in different venues or on different days of the week or different weeks of the month, to suit their members. There is the added bonus that both groups retain friendship groups which new members can join.

One of the groups, split and changed the venue of one of the groups to a location that was more convenient for just over half of the members.” – Carlton and Gedling u3a

Moving to a new venue is a fairly straightforward solution, particularly if your interest group coordinator has a list of possible venues. This might not be such a problem in these Covid times, if groups are meeting online or as hybrid group.

Starting a new group, finally, may be the best way forward for a particular group. Clearly, only offering new members the opportunity to go on a waiting list is not terribly attractive. Starting a new group can work well where a u3a is fairly proactive in getting interested members together and facilitating a discussion to find a solution.

“Ask members to let groups coordinator know when a group is full, to enable groups coordinator to begin the process of starting a new group.” – Beeston u3a

“We find generally members are reluctant to volunteer to become [group convenors] but if we can get a group together without initially insisting on [having one], we can soon find a volunteer to take on the role – often the new member who was reluctant to volunteer!” – Caterham u3a

“We have banned the words ‘closed’ and ‘currently fully subscribed’. If there is even a short waiting list, we will encourage one of the people on the list to act as convenor with support from the existing convenor. The existing convenor will offer to sit in with the new group for the first few meetings. This is exactly how we have grown to 4 art groups, 4 table tennis groups, 6 French groups, etc!” – Chepstow u3a