**Setting up new u3a Activity/ Interest Groups: information for potential new leaders**

 Thank you for your interest in setting up a new u3a activity/interest group. If you have any questions after reading this introductory guide please contact gls@u3a-luton.org.uk or 01582 803923

1. **The Purpose of u3a Interest Groups**

The u3a is a UK wide movement which brings together people who are no longer in full time employment to develop their interests and continue their learning in a friendly and informal environment. The u3a national body -The Third Age Trust- looks after all u3as by providing educational and administrative support.

Local u3as offer activities which aim to satisfy the widest possible range of interests: educational, cultural, recreational, physical and social. Interest Groups are a vital means of doing this.

Interest Groups are autonomous and self-financing. The Groups Liaison Service in u3a Luton (GLS) will support and advise so that groups can operate smoothly for all their members.

# 2. Who Are Group Leaders / Coordinators?

* Individual groups are organised by Group Leaders who volunteer their time and skills to help others learn.
* The Group Leader is a member of the group who may have a body of knowledge/skills or experience in the chosen subject, although this is not essential. They take overall responsibility for the activities and plan the yearly programme, usually after discussion with members.
* They are the link between the group members and the u3a Luton Group Liaison Service (GLS).
* Each group also has someone to act as the group contact, keep the register and do the accounts. Some groups have a leader who does all these things. In other groups the tasks are shared.
* Group Leaders (or another member of the group) can be trained to use our dedicated u3a online membership system Beacon to assist with group admin. It is simple and user friendly and only requires internet access.
* Some groups have an assistant group leader to act as deputy when the group leader is absent and to share the duties of organising the group's activities. For a larger group a committee may be appointed to assist with these duties. Succession planning is important.
* The frequency of meetings, venue, refreshments and other related matters should be discussed and agreed by the group.

* Group Leaders are not entitled to any financial benefit or discount arising from their position. For example, when organising a group trip the benefit of any “free place” offered must be shared between ALL participants.

**3. Procedure for setting up new Interest Groups**

* 1. Once a proposal for a new group is notified to GLS, they will discuss with the proposer what they see as the aim of the group; what name best describes the group and whether they are in a position to lead the group.
* *Some groups can work without a leader with particular experience of the subject but others (such as languages or dancing) may require someone who can impart their advanced knowledge. Paid tutors, however, are not within the spirit of u3a as a self-help group and must be avoided as far as possible. Please consult GLS if you are considering paying a tutor as there are various financial and legal implications.*
	1. Once the above information is available, GLS will advertise the group on the website, monthly notice board and newsletter and collect the names and membership numbers of interested members.
* *For most activities GLS usually aims to have 6- 8 interested members before trying to launch the new group. Experience shows that several people may drop out before the group begins, either because the chosen day prevents some joining or because the members decide that the group is not for them. An initial take-up of fewer than 5 persons can make it difficult to sustain a new group. When attendance is irregular the remaining attendees may be nervous about participating in a very small group and further drop outs can result in failure of the group.*
* *Depending on the demand for the subject and the time of year, it can take 3-4 months to gather enough names for a launch meeting. If it takes longer than this to collect sufficient names then GLS will discuss with the proposer whether to go ahead with a smaller group.*
	1. When the list is long enough, if appropriate, GLS will organise a set-up meeting by agreeing possible dates with the proposed leader and contacting the interested members. A member of GLS will normally host and chair this meeting.
* *This meeting will determine the aims and objectives of the group, the day, time, frequency and venue for the meetings and appoint personnel to coordinate the group (telephone contact, treasurer, and leader). GLS will try to progress this as quickly as possible but delays in setting up this meeting can occur if members do not respond promptly or if holidays etc prevent a suitable date being found immediately.*
	1. GLS will notify all interested parties of the outcome of the meeting (including those who could not attend but still wish to join) and share contact details. GLS remain available to help and support the new group in the first few months, if needed.

We look forward to working with you to launch your proposed new group.

Groups Liaison Service

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