

Interest Groups – A Guide for Group Leaders



Group:

Group leader(s):

MADu3a Groups' Coordinator:

e-mail: madu3agroup@gmail.com

Websites: MADu3a: <https://u3asites.org.uk/melbourne-area/home>

National u3a: www.u3a.org.uk

September 2023

Introduction to MADu3a interest groups

It is often said that interest groups are the life blood of the u3a and each MADu3a group will develop its own way of working. However, it is important that our groups aim to embrace the u3a ethos of shared, participative and self-help learning, as appropriate to the interest group. ***'The teachers learn, and the learners teach.'*** The result then will be an increase in knowledge as well as a supportive and friendly atmosphere which enables everyone to participate. Group leaders and their assistants play a key role in the running of our interest groups and are highly valued members of MADu3a.

Role Description MADu3a Group Leaders

The main role of the Group Leader is to establish and maintain the group, to organise the group's schedule of meetings, to be a source of information for potential members and a contact point for information.

Main Responsibilities:

- Oversee and organise the content and delivery of your interest group for the enjoyment of our members.
- Organise an appropriate time and venue for meetings.
- Consider appointing an assistant or co-leader to support you with some of the role responsibilities.
- Use Beacon to maintain an accurate group list (or arrange for your assistant to do this).
- Supply our newsletter and Facebook editor with contributions when appropriate.
- Check that your group's website and Beacon pages are up to date and inform the Groups' Coordinator if there are changes you wish to make.
- Attend Group Leader meetings or arrange for a representative to go.
- Contribute to Open Days and other events.
- Comply with MADu3a financial procedures, Data Protection and Privacy guidance and all relevant health and safety guidance, including assessment of risk and keeping attendance records.

Note: if you are uncertain about using Beacon to manage your group, log on then click on the Beacon User Guide for help. Please contact the Groups' Coordinator or Beacon/GDPR committee member if you need further guidance.

More on Policies and Procedures

Group Leaders should take a look at the MADu3a website links to our policies on:

- Finance
- Data Protection
- Safeguarding
- Privacy
- Accessibility
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

These policies are reviewed periodically.

Simple guide to MADu3a procedures for your group

Please get in touch with a committee member if you are unsure about any aspect of these procedures or want to ask about something not covered here.

Finance

- You may collect money necessary to run your group, for example for room hire.
- You can maintain a cash float to a £30 maximum. Surplus to the Treasurer to be held on behalf of your group.
- Keep a record of all income and expenditure. Details to the Treasurer by the end of October and March (reminders will be sent).
- Ask for any invoices to be made out to Melbourne Area Derby u3a.

Data Protection and Privacy

- Keep member details secure. Beacon is the system designed by u3as, for u3as to use; it provides a simple way for you to manage your group whilst maintaining privacy. Use Beacon to communicate with your group about activities. If you do use WhatsApp it should be with the express agreement of all group members. Similarly with e mail – or use the ‘bcc’ facility to protect your members’ information. Details should be kept up-to-date (eg. if someone joins or leaves your group).
- Photographs: some members do not wish to be included in group photos. They can simply step out of shot.
- Health: any information deemed necessary should be given with the express consent of the member.
- Use strong passwords and do not share them.

Attendance

- Please keep an attendance record of your meetings (required for our insurance cover).
- Non-members may not attend but are allowed to try a maximum of two MADu3a sessions in total before joining, eg. a general meeting and one group meeting. Please inform the Groups’ Coordinator of any non-member attending a group meeting.

- Guests from some neighbouring u3as may attend groups that have agreed with the Committee to be part of the MADu3a reciprocal arrangement. Please note that only certain undersubscribed groups are involved. These guests must show their membership card or other evidence of current membership and complete a 'guest member' contact form, available from the Chair. Again, inform the Groups' Coordinator when a guest member joins the group.

Risk assessments

- Please complete risk assessments for your activity as appropriate, again required for our insurance cover. You will find checklists on the MADu3a website. The national website has a useful guide ('Risk assessment FAQs') which gives further advice on this. Your Groups' Coordinator can also help you.

Problem solving

Sometimes issues can arise within a group that disrupt the smooth running and spoil the enjoyment for everyone. Don't leave a problem too long before trying to resolve it. You may have potential problems regarding regular non-attendees, for example venue capacity. Talk to your Groups' Coordinator or a committee member if you are unsure how to resolve the problem or just want someone to explore options with.

Accidents and incidents

Report all accidents and incidents to your committee as soon as possible and complete an incident form. It is as well to have an accurate record in case of future problems relating to the incident. Remember that the Third Age Trust provides insurance for group activities. For some groups you may consider it necessary to ask members to hold or provide emergency contact details (please ask for further advice on this if appropriate to your activity).

Proformas

These can be found on the MADu3a website. Follow 'Links' to **Group Leader**

Resources:

- Attendance record
- Venue-based risk assessment checklist
- Home-based risk assessment checklist
- Day trip risk assessment checklist
- Outdoor activity risk assessment checklist
- Walk Leader risk assessment checklist
- Incident form

Guidance on forming new groups

Thank you for considering setting up a new 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.

- **You do not have to be an expert in the chosen subject to lead a group.** Finding things out or discussing together is an excellent way to learn. Enthusiasm for the subject and a willingness to encourage others to join you in exploring it, are all that is required. Some of the best groups are those where no one person is “the teacher” but where everyone takes a turn at researching and presenting a topic, and thus the group learns together.
- **All interest groups are run by our members, for our members.** We never pay members to lead or teach our groups.
- **You don’t have to do everything yourself.** We encourage you to involve your group members in running the group. This might involve taking turns to host meetings in different members’ homes, organising refreshments, taking turns to research and present a topic, organising a visit or taking responsibility for dealing with any money the group needs to handle, for example, towards the cost of hiring a room.
- **The MADu3a Committee** is there to help with any aspect of running your group including starting up. You should share your plans with us through the Groups’ Coordinator. We may know of people who are already on a waiting list for a new group in your chosen subject area.

Recommended steps are:

1. **Choose your topic** Consider the aims of the interest group – what are you hoping to learn/achieve/share by offering the group. Write a short description of what the group will do. This can be very general (eg. Book Group: reading and discussing selected fiction) or more specific (eg. Introduction to Genealogy: a programme of four sessions covering topics x, y and z). Informal soundings can indicate the interest your group will attract.
2. **Subject Advisers** Is there an existing national u3a Subject Adviser who can support with ideas? An alternative might be to contact a neighbouring u3a to see if they have a similar subject group and then talk to the group leader to get some first-hand knowledge.
3. **Choose your time** Groups normally meet on a regular day for about 2 hours. Some groups meet monthly, others fortnightly and some meet weekly. We don’t often have evening or weekend meetings, but it may be worth trying. The Groups’ Coordinator will know when other groups meet and what times to avoid.

4. **Consider your venue** Some groups meet in a local hall, others in someone's home. Consider accessibility when looking for suitable premises as we aim to be as inclusive as possible. See the list of local venues for options.
5. **Consider financing** The group should be self-financing. There is a small amount of money available to support the setting up of a new group; a brief 'business plan' will inform the Committee in considering your request. (Note that your group members, Groups' Coordinator and the Treasurer should agree to the invoicing and payment arrangements in advance.)
6. **Health and Safety** You should also consider whether there are any risks in the group's activities or venue. Use the appropriate risk assessment checklist to help.
7. **Discuss your ideas with the Groups' Coordinator** who can support you in formulating a plan for start-up and seek committee approval. Then you are ready to go ahead to the next stage.
8. **Generate interest** by promoting your group and organising an initial meeting. This could include developing publicity via existing groups, via the MADu3a newsletter, website or Facebook page or talking to members in groups that you attend. Invite people, including the Groups' Coordinator, to attend your initial meeting.
9. **The first meeting**
 - Introduce yourself and the purpose of the group as you see it.
 - Ask about the skills within the group.
 - Agree the roles that need covering to run the group and who is willing to support these - helping with the programme or keeping the register for example. Be aware that some may be reticent at the start.
 - Agree, if relevant, the level that the group will be aimed at – beginners, improvers, advanced.
 - Discuss 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.
 - 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.
 - Agree some ground rules, for example:
 - Listen to each other and allow others to speak, every contribution matters
 - Let someone know if you are unable to come
 - Agree to disagree amicably and be respectful to other group members
 - Have patience with and encourage those who are slower to learn
10. **Finalise your arrangements with the Groups' Coordinator** who will feed back to the committee. You are now ready to start your interest group activities. Once established new group leaders will be given access to and details on how to use Beacon. We wish you every success. Good luck.



Addendum 1 : Committee members 2023-24

Committee members can be contacted through the facility on the MADu3a website (see 'Contact') or via the gmail addresses given below

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Chair | Margaret Whitehead | madu3achair@gmail.com |
| Vice Chair | Marjorie Tunnicliffe | madu3avicechair@gmail.com |
| Treasurer | Robert Anderson | madu3amoney.gmail.com |
| Secretary | Jackie Lane | madu3abussec@gmail.com |
| Membership | Margaret Whitehead | madu3amem@gmail.com |
| Groups | Sue Kerr | madu3agroup@gmail.com |
| Events | Marjorie Tunnicliffe, Diana Wilkins | |
| Beacon/GDPR (Data Protection) | Geoff Dowell | madu3adata@gmail.com |
| Support | Dominic Clarke, Lyn Hackett, Alison Keay, Allan Randall | |

Addendum 2 : MADu3a Local venues (as at September 2023)

Note: not exhaustive – there will be other possible venues for you to consider

MELBOURNE ASSEMBLY ROOMS (MARS)

Several rooms at MARS: Hall, Lounge, Melbourne Room

High Street, Melbourne DE73 8GF

info @melbourneassemblyrooms.co.uk

Development manager = Andy Heafield 01332 863522 (complete booking form)

Also: Melbourne Library (Derbyshire Libraries) based in MARS 01629 533363

THOMAS COOK MEMORIAL HALL

84 High Street, Melbourne DE73 8GJ

Contact: Marie Brown 07484650181

MELBOURNE SPORTING PARTNERSHIP (MSP)

Cockshut Lane, Melbourne DE73 8DG Contact: Alex Slater (MSP Manager)
07966933583

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

87 Derby Road, Melbourne DE73 8FE Contact: Sandra 07724178080

MELBOURNE CATHOLIC CHURCH HALL

Church Street, Melbourne DE73 8EJ 01332 862631

PUBS/CAFES The following have been used for group meetings:

Bank of Beers, Spirit Vaults, Melbourne Inn

VILLAGE HALLS

Weston on Trent village hall: <https://westonontrentvillagehall.co.uk/Bookings.php>

Ticknall Village Hall: <https://www.ticknallife.co.uk/village-hall-booking-form/>

Barrow on Trent village hall: <https://www.barrowupontrentparish.co.uk/village-halls.html>

Aston on Trent memorial hall: <https://www.thewarmemorialhall.co.uk/book-here>



Addendum 3: Participative learning and learning styles – some ideas from the national website

‘Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.’ Benjamin Franklin

‘Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try’. Anon

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. Variation in content, method and style can make the learning experience more vibrant and appealing. Many of us will have particular skills but most of us will use a combination of the following: -

Visual: using pictures, diagrams, images and spatial understanding.

Verbal: using words – both spoken and written.

Auditory: using sounds, rhythm, music, spoken presentations.

Physical/kinaesthetic: using hands, body, senses and acting things out.

Logical/Mathematical: using logic, systems, sequences, data, statistics.

Social: learning as part of a group, sharing experiences and explaining your understanding to others.

Solitary: studying on your own.

Consider the following options:

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, story-telling.

Drama: Create a short sketch. Provide some entertainment for your monthly meeting.

Themes: Have an event or presentation linked to a specific topic.

Liaise with a school or community group: eg. local history presentation, art exhibition, debate.

Liaise with other organisations: museums, universities, libraries. Very useful for Shared Learning Projects.

Shared Learning Projects: These are opportunities to work on short term projects with other u3as or outside organisations. They usually involve research and have a definite outcome.

Study days and workshops: Plan one for your own members or as part of a local network. eg. Family History Day, Language day, Story-telling workshop, debate, quiz, music.

Online learning: MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses), YouTube 'How to' videos, Future Learn.

Help and support

Resources

Subject Advisers: Trust volunteers with specialist knowledge in a wide range of topics. Contact details on the national website www.u3a.org.uk and in the magazine 'Third Age Matters'. Note: you may need to create an account to view some support materials.

External organisations: museums, libraries, schools, universities.

u3a publications: check the national website for the latest publications.

Networks, regions, neighbouring u3as: allow you to draw on experience from within the movement.

Regional Trustee: will provide an overview of the region and a link to National Office.

National Office: It is recommended that you also have a look at the advice section of the National Office website where a range of useful information can be found. It is also a good idea to sign up to the newsletter that is sent out by the Trust every month as this will keep you up to date with wider u3a news. You can sign up to the newsletter via the national website. The staff team are available Monday to Friday to offer support.

Other learning opportunities

- Shared Learning Projects and Shared Learning Project Coordinators – contact details available from the national website
- National and Regional Summer Schools
- Events facilitated by National Office
- National, Regional and Network Workshops and study days
- Outreach departments of universities

Sharing information

It can be good to share information about your group which can be done in a number of ways:

- On the MADu3a website and/or Facebook page (currently via the Secretary/Chair)
- In the u3a newsletter
- At network or local events such as Melbourne Arts Festival

Copyright

The Trust and MADu3a hold a licence to copy some materials for educational use within groups. If you are going to be using copyright material in any form, for example, printed, audio or pictures, please check with the advice section of the national website.

Remember you may have to create a log on /password to access the advice. The document 'Copyright and licences' should guide you and answer your questions.

Addendum 4: the u3a ethos (from the national website)

Our Vision

Our Vision is to make lifelong learning, through the experience of u3a, a reality for all third agers.

Our Mission

Our Mission declares our purpose as an organisation and serves as the standard against which we weigh our actions and decisions. It is to:

- Facilitate the growth of the u3a movement.
- Provide support for management and learning in u3as.
- Raise the profile of the u3a movement.
- Promote the benefits of learning in later life through self-help learning.

u3a principles

The u3a ethos is based on three principles:

The Third Age Principle:

- 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.