

# EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY



## Introduction

Preston & District u3a (hereafter the u3a) has a Code of Conduct Policy that seeks to deal with the way that Members are treated within the u3a and to ensure that bullying and poor behaviour is dealt with in an appropriate manner. This policy should be read in conjunction with that Code of Conduct.

## Definitions

### Relevant Individuals:

Membership of the u3a is open to all in their third age, which is defined not by a particular age but by a period in life in which full-time employment has ceased.

### Vulnerable Adults:

Everybody has different levels of vulnerability and each of us may be regarded as vulnerable at some time. All members who may be vulnerable have a right to protection from all types of harm or abuse.

**See Appendix 1**

### Accessibility for Disabled Members:

The u3a will do all it can to be as accessible as possible both to existing members and to third agers in the local communities who may wish to join. We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people with disabilities can attend the interest groups of their choice, without necessarily needing a companion/carer with them. Members who cannot manage to participate in their chosen u3a activities without help may bring a companion/carer with them, who for the time that they are in attendance, will be covered by the liability insurance provided by The Third Age Trust. The only exception to this is a professionally employed carer who would have to be covered by an individual liability policy.

**See Appendix 2**

### Supporting Members with Hearing Loss:

On request from the individual member, the u3a will make reasonable efforts to support those with hearing loss so that they can continue to enjoy and participate in u3a activities.

**See Appendix 3**

### Supporting Members with Vision Loss:

On request from the individual member, the u3a will support members with vision loss so that they can continue to enjoy and participate in u3a activities.

**See Appendix 4**

**Adopted April 2018**

**Reviewed and updated April 2021**

**Next review date January 2024**

**VULNERABLE ADULTS**

Everybody has different levels of vulnerability and each of us may be regarded as vulnerable at some time. All members who may be vulnerable have a right to protection from all types of harm or abuse.

In all our activities, we will:

- Value, listen and respect members who may be vulnerable.
- Ensure that all members feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse.
- Recognise equality amongst people and relationships.
- Do all we can to help members who may be vulnerable, to be and remain active contributors within the u3a and if they are or become unable to participate independently, encourage them to bring a companion/carer with them in order that they can continue to enjoy the benefits of u3a membership.
- Ensure all members are aware of their responsibilities to protect vulnerable adults.

**u3a MEMBERS AND COMPANIONS/CARERS**

u3a membership is open to everybody in their third age, namely that are no longer in full time employment and with no parental responsibilities. u3as are self-help, co-operative organisations run entirely by the members for the members and therefore it is important that individuals are able to take full responsibility for their own participation in u3a interest groups and events. Should the situation arise when a member no longer feels confident that he/she can participate fully without needing help, it will be necessary for that person to be accompanied by a companion/carer who will be covered by the liability insurance provided by the Third Age Trust whilst in attendance. Even if you have members who are willing to help, you cannot allow them to take responsibility for another member's care as this could be deemed to be outside our insurance cover if any injury or damage resulted.

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

All u3as pursue an equal opportunities policy and as far as it is within their power to do so, provide equality of treatment to any person in their third age regardless of:

- Educational background.
- Sex (including gender reassignment).
- Marital status (including civil partnership status).
- Sexual orientation.
- Race or racial group (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins).
- Religion or belief.
- Disability
- Social status

u3as are committed to the furtherance of fair treatment and in the absence of discrimination in all their activities and strive to achieve a membership, which reflects the composition of the community they serve.

u3as must do all they can to be as accessible as possible both to their existing members and to third agers in their local communities who may wish to join. u3as must take all reasonable steps to ensure that people with disabilities can attend the interest groups of their choice, without necessarily needing a companion/carer with them and it is important to reassure them that you will do all you can to support them and make their attendance as easy and stress-free as possible. Members who cannot manage to participate in their chosen u3a activities without help, should be given the opportunity to bring a companion/carer with them, who for the time that they are in attendance, will be covered by the liability insurance provided by the Third Age Trust. The only exception to this is a professionally employed carer who would have to be covered by an individual liability policy.

**VENUES - GENERAL MEETINGS**

As far as possible ensure the venue fulfils the following criteria:

- Served by public transport.
- Adequate car parking facilities onsite or very close at hand including disabled parking bays.
- Ramp for building access.
- Ground floor accommodation where possible. If you are considering upper floor accommodation because there is a lift, you must ensure that onsite help can be provided with evacuation in the event of a fire.
- Accessible and usable disabled toilet facilities. Good disabled access.
- If feasible a sound system and loop or any other adjustments that may assist.
- Spacious enough to cope with wheelchairs/mobility scooters.
- Good lighting. Access to heating/air conditioning controls.

In addition, the u3a will consider the following:

- Working towards creating a map and directions for each of its venues.
- Having a designated person at general meetings who is easily identifiable, to ensure disabled members are provided with appropriate seating e.g. at the front for those who have vision or hearing loss and at the end of a row for those with mobility problems etc.
- Timing and length of meetings – e.g. not too early, not too late and not too long without a break.

**VENUES – INTEREST/ACTIVITY GROUPS**

Try to have a balance between groups in members' homes which tend to be inaccessible, and outside accommodation which ideally will be suitable for all. A member's home may be accessible because it has a level entrance, a wide doorway, a ground floor toilet, or no internal stairs. If you do have a disabled member who wants to attend a group held in a house, which is inaccessible for any reason, investigate whether there are any other options available, for example, could the group be hosted by that member.

**COMMUNICATION**

If a member makes known to the Safeguarding Officer that they have a specific need. The Officer will liaise with them and the committee to look at ways that will enable them to continue to participate in u3a activities. If having done all you can to make your interest/activity groups accessible and open to disabled members you find that there are still members who cannot participate in their chosen activities without help it is very important that you tell them, as stated above, that they are able to bring a companion or carer with them for support, who must remain for the extent of the activity. This should allow all members with a disability to continue to be able to participate and enjoy u3a and at the same time avoid your members getting involved in providing assistance, which they are not insured to do.

The following advice aims to support u3a members with hearing loss so that they can continue to enjoy and participate in u3a activities. Hearing loss can vary from mild to severe and may also prevent members from taking part in events and groups because they want to avoid feeling cut off from people in social situations. In all cases, it is important to approach it sensitively and appreciate that it can be difficult for members to admit, either to themselves or to others, that they are losing their hearing. Below, are some simple steps that can be taken by all members to make u3a events as accessible as possible and information on where members with hearing loss can find extra support for themselves.

## **HOW TO FACILITATE COMMUNICATION FOR SOMEONE WITH HEARING LOSS**

### *Speaking to Someone with Hearing Loss*

- Ensure that you are speaking clearly and distinctly but without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements.
- Speak at normal speed or just slightly slower, pausing between sentences and making sure you have been understood before moving on.
- Avoid using sentences that are unnecessarily long and complex and if the member has not understood what has been said, try and find a different way of saying it.
- One suggestion is, say the member's name before beginning a conversation. This gives the listener opportunity to focus attention so the first few words are not lost.
- Another suggestion is, ask a member if they have better hearing in one ear or another and make sure you are standing in the best place.

### *Setting Up an Activity*

- Try to minimize extraneous noise.
- Make sure that members take turns in speaking and encourage use of hand signals to attract attention.
- Have a pen and paper ready to write something down if necessary.
- Where possible, use a venue with a loop system or take a portable system and use microphones where available
- Check that any hearing support systems are working correctly before starting a talk.
- If feasible, make notes available either during the session (for instance a summary of the main points on a handout, flip chart or PowerPoint presentation) or as soon as possible afterwards.
- Encourage those who are hard of hearing to sit nearest the speaker or group leader and consider reserved seating.
- Let speakers know that some members of the audience are hard of hearing so they can adapt their speed and position.

### *Lip Reading*

- Find out who is lip reading so that you can be aware of how you position yourself in the room in relation to them.
- As much as possible face the person to whom you are speaking and keep your hands away from your face when talking.
- Be aware of light levels: avoid situations where light is shining in members' eyes or where lighting is too low to see someone's face clearly.
- Horseshoe or boardroom style layouts can increase visibility.
- If you have speakers, ideally they should be in front of a plain background and not too high.
- Use lapel microphones or ask speakers to ensure hand-held microphones do not obscure their face.

The following advice aims to support u3a members with vision loss so that they can continue to enjoy and participate in u3a activities. Losing your vision can be an isolating experience but there are ways in which u3as can support their members to continue to be part of the u3a community and have access to the learning experience. Members can experience a range of degrees of vision loss: having low vision, being partially sighted, being visually impaired or registered blind. Most members are informed about what their condition means for them and are able to suggest the support that they need but below are some general tips on how to adapt activities to make them as accessible as possible and some additional sources of information on vision loss.

## **HOW TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY OF u3a ACTIVITIES FOR MEMBERS WITH VISION LOSS**

### *Awareness*

The first step in increasing accessibility is for the committees to know which members are experiencing vision loss and what their needs are. If a member makes known to the Safeguarding Officer that they have a vision loss, the Officer will liaise with them and the committee to look at ways that will enable them to continue to participate in u3a activities.

### *Providing Accessible Information*

When producing text documents, remember:

- Light letters on a dark background are easier to read than dark on light.
- Avoid coloured lettering other than for large text titles. Dark blue and greens are the most effective. Ideal font size 18, minimum 16. Use either a standard Roman or Sans Serif font; Arial works well.
- Avoid decorative fonts, use bold type, avoid italics.
- Spacing between text should be wide; text with close letter spacing presents problems. A mono-spaced font such as Courier, which allocates an equal amount of space for each letter, is very readable.
- Avoid paper with a glossy finish.
- Consider engaging a volunteer to explain (in person or over the telephone) which interest groups are available and to provide information on whether they are suitable for people with different levels of vision loss.
- Increasing Accessibility in Groups and Monthly Meetings
- Provide seating close to the front to allow members with some vision loss to be as close to visual displays as possible.
- Try to reduce glare from windows and lights, for instance by positioning seating with the back to windows.
- Provide copies of presentations for use on a member's own laptop, which is usually adapted for specific needs.
- Use a room layout that allows participants to use their hearing more easily to follow what is going on, for instance in horse-shoe or boardroom layouts.
- Ensure that Group Leaders are informed of any requests for specific arrangements to be made in sufficient time ahead of the event.

The RNIB produces factsheets on how people with vision loss can continue to enjoy leisure activities, such as visiting galleries, going on trips and watching films and television, which could be applied to u3a group activities [www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/home-and-leisure](http://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/home-and-leisure).