

## **GUIDANCE FOR NEW INTEREST GROUP LEADERS**

### **Thinking of starting an interest group?**

Leading an interest group is less daunting than you might think!

Interest groups are the heart of the u3a, where like-minded individuals can share a passion or learn new skills. The members who lead these groups are highly valued, both by the committee and the group members. However, it is the nature of an interest group that every member contributes their knowledge and enthusiasm.

The committee has drawn up these guidelines to support you and will always be there for advice. In addition, you could chat to a current interest group leader about their experience.

If you are interested in starting a new interest group, please inform any committee member who will then advise the Secretary so that you can liaise over the next steps.

### **Putting your idea to the membership**

The Secretary is available to support you in drafting an outline of your idea which will be included in the next Newsletter to the full membership to establish the extent of interest. Those interested will be asked to reply directly to you by a certain date by e-mail, or if not on e-mail, to phone you or the Secretary, whichever you prefer.

The Secretary will also send your outline to the Webpage Co-ordinator to create a webpage on the Redditch u3a website for your group. This will contain an e-mail link for anyone from the public, or an existing member, to contact you directly. Your email address will not be visible to them. This webpage can be updated at any time as you confirm the format of your group meetings.

You might also like to explain your idea at a general meeting.

You may have a clear idea as to how you wish to run your group, but it is preferable to negotiate or clarify this with those interested. These negotiations could be by e-mail, Zoom or in person. The main objective at this stage is to establish a core of potential regular attendees.

### **Numbers and venue**

You need to consider the viable and/or maximum numbers the group can support.

For a venue, you may like to host the group yourself, or another member may be able to do so. You can of course, hire a suitable venue, on which the committee will be happy to advise.

Although we encourage new groups to meet in person, you may decide to meet by Zoom instead, either to begin with or on a long-term basis. (The u3a has a Zoom pro licence which can be used cost-free by legitimate u3a interest groups, so any restriction imposed on free Zoom versions will not apply. Access to the licensed Zoom account plus accompanying instructions will be provided, as will instruction in Zoom if needed.)

Please let the Secretary know of the chosen venue or if you will be using Zoom.

## **Financing your group**

Interest groups should be self-financing. If a room is hired and refreshments provided, you will need to set an attendance fee to cover those costs. If using your own home as the venue, you should still set a fee for the provision of refreshments, which you retain. Currently, other group leaders typically charge 50p for this.

Any photocopying or other expenses should be agreed and covered jointly by the interest group members.

You need to keep receipts for any expenses and draw up simple accounts showing income and expenditure for the financial year from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March. This should include any trips for which you collect money. If you are collecting only 'coffee and biscuit' money, you do not need to keep accounts.

At the end of the financial year, the u3a Treasurer needs to receive a copy of these accounts because the Charity Commissioners expect all group income and expenditure to be accounted for within the full accounts of Redditch u3a.

## **Day of week and frequency of meetings**

Interest group meetings are usually, but do not have to be, once a month. The choice of frequency is entirely up to the members and the group leader. For example, language groups often prefer to meet twice a month. For other groups, it may be more appropriate to meet on an ad hoc basis.

The Secretary will send you a copy of the existing schedule of Redditch u3a meetings, showing when the other groups meet. To decide the day of the month for your meetings, please consult it and if possible, avoid clashing with any other existing meetings. You can then set an initial meeting date, and if different, your regular day(s) of the month for your group meetings.

When you have decided the frequency and the regular day(s) of the month (where appropriate) for your meetings, please advise the Secretary so that the existing schedule can be updated to include your choice.

## **Membership of your group**

Everyone who attends your group meetings or trips must be a fully paid-up member, to ensure the group is covered by our Public Liability Insurance.

If they have not already joined, please require them to complete an application form, and give them instructions for sending it and their payment to the Membership Secretary, or to take it to an information session for new members or to a Tuesday meeting.

The Membership Secretary or Secretary can advise you of any reduction in membership fee available for part of a year's membership.

It is permissible for a potential member to attend your group **once only** to try it out. (They may also attend one meeting of each of two other types of meeting or group before becoming a member.)

### **Embracing new members**

A new member might join your group at any time. Please give them a warm welcome, introduce them to all the other members present, explain the format of the meetings, and support them in making an active contribution. Be sure to take their contact details.

Please ensure that at any meeting, every member present is known to all others.

### **Keeping your members informed**

It is wise to hold a list of addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses for your members so you can easily contact them with any supplementary information or changes to arrangements.

Remember that this information (whether held on computer or on paper) is subject to the Data Protection Act and should be held securely, and never passed on to any third party. The committee will give guidance and training if necessary.

### **Ongoing publicity**

The Newsletter Editor will be pleased to publicise the date and topic of your first and subsequent meetings in the monthly Newsletter. Please send these details when material is requested for the next Newsletter.

Once the group is up and running, a publicity flyer will be drawn up by the committee on your behalf, in consultation with you: please send the Secretary up to 250 words to describe your group's activities, and details of where and when you meet. If the meetings are being hosted in a private home, simply give the area of Redditch, rather than the full address of the location.

The Secretary will then pass this description to the Chair, who will draw up the flyer for your group in the standard format which we have adopted for new and prospective members to consult; and to the Website Co-ordinator to update the webpage for your group.

### **Delegation**

Leaders may share the work by inviting members to undertake tasks, for example, collecting money for outings or providing refreshments.

### **Further support**

Please email the Secretary on [redditchu3asecretary@gmail.com](mailto:redditchu3asecretary@gmail.com) if you have any additional questions.

### **Finally**

A sincere thank you from the committee for all your efforts!

12/22