

Group Convenors Handbook

Group Convenors Handbook	1
Introduction.....	2
1 u3a Principles.....	3
2 Convenors and Deputies.....	4
3 Developing and Maintaining a Group's Profile.....	6
4 Developing and Managing a Group	7
5 Managing Membership.....	10
6 Communication and Interaction.....	12
7 Health and Safety.....	13
8 Sharing Groups with Another u3a	18
9 Financial Matters	20
10 Problem Solving and Managing Issues	22
11 Accidents and Incidents.....	23
12 Equipment and Resources	24
Appendix 1 Data Protection and Privacy	25
Appendix 2 Beacon Membership System	26
Appendix 3 Insurance	27
Appendix 4 Incident From	28
Appendix 5 Role Description for a Group Convenor	33
Appendix 6 Role Description for a Groups Coordinator	34

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

Introduction

Purpose of the Group Convenors Handbook

The purpose of the Group Convenors Handbook (Handbook) is to provide a comprehensive guide to support the role of an Interest Group Convenor (Convenor).

Background

Interest groups, including outings and social groups (Groups) are at the very heart of u3a activities. Each Group has at least one named Convenor who is the contact point for the Group. Without volunteers willing to take on this role, Groups would not be able to operate.

All Convenors must be a member of the Roding Valley (RV) u3a.¹

For many Groups, the Convenor is a facilitator, someone who has a special interest in the subject rather than an expert, specialist, or teacher. In this way members are encouraged to develop their own knowledge and skills across a range of interests, be they educational, cultural, recreational, physical, or social.

Groups are largely free to run as they wish within the u3a principles of shared, participative, and lifelong learning. <https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning>

There is no fixed format or procedures that must be followed and always room for innovation. That said, the guidance within this Handbook, should always be taken into consideration. Group members are encouraged to share their expertise and experience as well as aspects of administration, organisation, and activity planning.

The Groups Coordinator provides ongoing support for Groups. Their details are in the monthly newsletter.

Being a Convenor involves a modest amount of work but at the same time is rewarding and enjoyable. It is a vital and invaluable job and the success of the RV u3a depends on the Convenors.

Design of the Handbook

The Handbook has been designed to align exactly with the Role Description of a Convenor. Each section within the Role Description has the same numbering as the sections within the Handbook. This is for ease of reference. A copy of the Role Description is provided as an appendix to this Handbook.

Scope of the Handbook

The Handbook has been designed to cover all the main areas where a Convenor may have questions. If a Convenor has further questions, they should contact the Groups Coordinator. The link on the Welcome page of the RV u3a website can also be used to raise issues or questions.

The Beacon Membership System

Within the Handbook there are several references to Beacon. Beacon is the computer system used to manage the membership data for RV u3a. The system includes a significant amount of functionality that can help the Convenors manage their Groups. Convenors wishing to use Beacon to manage their Groups will be given a personal login that will allow them to update their Group Profile and Membership, but not view or access the data for other groups. There will be initial training and ongoing support for Beacon users. Further information is provided as an appendix to this Handbook.

¹ Any exceptions must be formally approved by the RV u3a Committee

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

1 u3a Principles

The u3a ethos is based on three principles. These should be kept in mind when establishing and running a Group.

1.1 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.

1.2 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.

1.3 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.

2 Convenors and Deputies

2.1 Number Of Convenors

A Group must have a minimum of one Convenor and a maximum of 4. It is recognised that for large Groups, such as the theatre Group, splitting the management of the work is sensible, however, one person should be the lead Convenor and act as the point of contact with the Groups Coordinator. (On the Beacon Membership System, numerous Convenors can be included but there is only one main contact name.)

2.2 Deputies

A Convenor can at any time appoint a deputy. If this occurs, they must inform all the members of their Group and the Groups Coordinator and if using Beacon, the Beacon Administrator.

2.3 Standing Down as a Convenor

If a Convenor wishes to stand down, a new convenor would usually be agreed by the members within the group. Convenors should try to nurture someone in the Group who could take over if required. If nobody wishes to be the Groups Convenor, then the present Convenor needs to contact the Groups Coordinator as early as possible so that alternative arrangements to continue the Group can be explored.

If a Convenor is standing down, they must pass on all relevant information about the Group to the new Convenor. This may be in electronic or paper format. If the new Convenor has not been appointed or the Group is closing information should be passed to the Groups Coordinator. The Convenor standing down should they delete any Group / Members data they hold via electronic devices and securely destroy any paperwork that has not been passed over.

2.4 Help and Support for Convenors

2.4.1 U3a Subject Advisers and Networks

Subject Advisers are Third Age Trust Volunteers with specialist knowledge in a wide range of topics. Their contact details are available on the u3a website and in the Third Age Matters magazine. Subject Advisers can provide advice on both the setting up of a Group of their subject area and the sustainability of ones already in existence, which may benefit from new ideas or a different approach.

u3a Subject Networks provide a platform for u3a members to connect and come together around their interests.

u3a Subject Surgeries are an opportunity to share resources and ideas, as well as access help setting up a Group within the u3a, all members are welcome. The u3a website provides information about these topics

2.4.2 Support, Advice, and Information

All Convenors can also contact the u3a office for information and advice by calling 020 8466 6139 or emailing: u3a.office@u3a.org.uk.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

2.4.3 Third Age Trust Workshops

The u3a office runs several online workshops to support all Trustees and Convenors, including ‘Interest Groups Matter’. The workshops also provide an opportunity to meet other u3a members from across the country. More information about other workshop topics and how to book can be found on the u3a workshops page.

3 Developing and Maintaining a Group's Profile

3.1 The Profile

Each Group will have a Profile that will be used to populate the website, Beacon (the membership system) and the prospectus. The Profile is defined when the Group is set up (see following section)

A Group's profile is made up of the following details.

- Group Name
- Convenor/s Names/s
- Convenor/s Contact Details (These details will only be available to current members)
- Venue
- Day (include note if the Group is only planned to run for a limited period)
- Time (include start and approximate end time)
- Aim
- About - this is normally 3 or 4 lines (but can be more) describing how the Group operates
- Maximum Numbers in The Group
- Accessibility Restrictions (See note below)

The current Profiles of all Groups (excluding contact details) are available on <https://u3asites.org.uk/rodingvalley/Groups>.

3.2 Time Limited Groups

Group may be established to run for a specific period. This is perfectly acceptable. If this is the case, potential members must be made aware of this when joining.

3.3 Maintaining The Group's Profile

The Convenor is responsible for informing the Groups Coordinator and Website Manager if any of these details change. The easiest way to do this is email RVu3a@hotmail.com, alternatively they can be contacted directly via the email addresses on the monthly newsletter.

Accessibility Restrictions

Accessibility restrictions covers both the **access** to the venue where a Group activity is occurring, and the **minimum physical requirements required** or **knowledge/experience** to be able to participate in the Group. This would include items such as a minimum level of knowledge of a language or requirement to be able to use stairs.

4 Developing and Managing a Group

4.1 Initial Steps

The table below summaries the recommended steps for starting a new Group. The Groups Coordinator will provide further information and advice.

The role of the Groups Coordinator is very important when establishing a Group. The role description for the Groups Coordinator is provided as an appendix to this Handbook and should be read by all new Convenors.

The steps below assume that a potential Convenor has been identified. If there is general interest for a Group, but no Convenor at this stage, the Groups Coordinator will temporarily take on this role.

Thing to consider when starting a new Group
Agree the development of a Group with the Groups Coordinator.
Consider what interest there might be in the subject perhaps by speaking to other members at a monthly meeting or asking for feedback in a newsletter.
Start developing the Group's Profile – See previous section for more information on a Group's Profile .
Consider what the aims of the Group are – what are you hoping to learn/achieve/share by offering the Group?
Establish if there is an existing u3a Trust Subject Adviser who can support with ideas for the development of the Group. There is a list of all Subject Advisers on the u3a website. An alternative could be to contact neighbouring u3as to see if they have a similar subject Group and talking to their Group Convenor/Leader. It may also be possible for you to sit in on a Group meeting.
Generate interest by promoting your Group using as many different methods as possible. This could include developing publicity in the form of a flyer, poster, promotion via existing Groups, via the RV u3a newsletter, sharing at a monthly meeting and talking to members in Groups that you attend. The more methods you use, the more successful you are likely to be.
With the help of the Groups Coordinator, create a "sign-up" sheet to go on the Groups table at the monthly meeting.
Consider whether there are any risks that might occur because of the Group's activities. More information is provided in the section on Health and Safety .
Identify what you want to achieve from your first meeting.
Liaise with the Groups Coordinator/Treasurer regarding any initial financing that may be required and how this needs to be managed. More information is provided in the section on Financial Matters .
Organise an initial meeting and invite those who have expressed an interest to attend.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

4.2 The Initial Group Meeting

Recommended steps to take at the initial meeting are provided in the table below. Again, further assistance will be provided by the Groups Coordinator.

Initial Steps
Introduce yourself and the purpose of the Group as you see it.
Ask about the skills and experience within the Group.
Agree the tasks that need doing to run the Group and who is willing to support these – for example, who is willing to help with developing the programme or keep the register.
Agree, if relevant, the level that the Group will be aimed at – beginners, improvers, advanced.
Agree 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. Refer to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion information on the national u3a website for advice and guidance.
Agree the costs for running the Group and what members will pay. All Groups must be self-financing, but the Committee may agree a small budget to help the Group become established.
Discuss how Group members will communicate with each other bearing in mind data protection guidance (e.g. always using the BCC function on emails to avoid sharing addresses between all members) and always seek permission and agreement.
Agree some ground rules e.g. Be punctual - Listen to each other - Allow others to speak - Let someone know if you are unable to come - Have patience with and encourage those who are slower to learn
Update the Groups Profile

After the first meeting it is a good idea to feedback what was agreed to the Groups Coordinator to finalise arrangements.

4.3 After the Initial Group Meeting

Recommended steps to take after the initial meeting are provided in the table below. Again, further assistance will be provided by the Groups Coordinator.

Next Steps
Communicate with all the potential group members, explaining what was agreed at the initial meeting.
Confirm the Profile of the Group and ask them to confirm that they wish to be a member of the Group.
Send out a formal invitation to the first meeting
Communicate with the Website Manager and Newsletter Editor, providing details of the new Group. See the section on Communication and Interaction for more details.

4.4 Lack of Members

If a Group cannot attract or maintain sufficient members, the Convenor should discuss this with the Groups Coordinator who will try to raise the membership via publicity or making it a Shared Group. (See following sections.)

A Convenor should not close a Group without having first discussed this with the Groups Coordinator.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

4.5 Closing a Group

If, after having worked with the Groups Coordinator, it is agreed to close the Group, the Convenor (with support from the Groups Coordinator if required), should communicate with all the Groups members by the normal methods and explain the position.

The communication should explain that if the members have any concerns, questions, or suggestions for maintaining the Group, they should contact the Groups Coordinator.

Further details are provided in the section **Standing Down as a Convenor**.

Other Considerations

4.6 Booking A Venue

All venues must be booked via the Hall and Venue Booking Coordinator. They can be contacted via the link on the Contacts Page of the RV u3a website.

4.7 Breach of Copyright

Copyright Infringement is where someone uses the whole or a substantial part of a person's work without their permission and none of the exceptions to copyright apply. The Government website provides expert guidance on copyright legislation: [Enforcing your copyright - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/enforcing-your-copyright)

Generally, there is no infringement of copyright if members are copying material including music, maps, newspapers, magazines for **private study and research**. But this is a complex area.

If a Group is unsure if their activities could potentially generate a breach of copyright, then they should look to the u3a trust guidance on copyright. This can be found on the RV u3a website at:

<https://u3asites.org.uk/rodingvalley/page/97675> or [Roding Valley u3a: Governance \(u3asites.org.uk\)](https://u3asites.org.uk/rodingvalley/page/97675)

4.8 Photographs of Groups

The Website Manager or a member of the Committee may occasionally ask for photographs of a Group for publicity purposes. The Convenor must ensure all members of the Group have agreed to having their photographs used for publicity.

Before supplying a photograph for publicity, the Convenor should send an email to all the people in the photo, (with a copy of the photo attached) informing them of how it will be used and ask for them to reply if they are not happy with their image being shared as described.

4.9 Naming Members in Newsletters

Convenors are encouraged to write articles about their Group in the monthly newsletter. They should only name members of their Group in full, if they had had their permission in advance.

5 Managing Membership

5.1 Maintaining A Membership List

Convenors should maintain a list of all the members in their Group.

At a minimum this should include:

- Name
- Emails Address
- Phone Number
- Emergency Contact Details

The list can be maintained directly on Beacon, or on a personal electronic device or paper.

Convenors must follow the guidelines for protecting members personal data. This is available in the RV Data protection Policy. This can be found at [Roding Valley u3a: Data Protection and Privacy Policies \(u3asites.org.uk\)](https://u3asites.org.uk) and an extract is provided as an appendix to this Handbook.

5.2 New Members

As part of the Group Profile (see previous section) Convenors should have agreed with the Group Members, the maximum number of people that can be accommodated within the Group.

RVu3a members who are interested in joining a Group may contact the Convenor directly or via the website / Group Coordinator.

If a new member wants to join the Group, subject to availability and any accessibility restrictions (see note in the Group's Profile section), the member should be allowed to join.

A new member can attend one Group meeting as a "taster session" prior to formally joining the Group.

Before a Convenor accepts a member into their Group, they must ask the member for their membership number and check on Beacon, or via any member of the Committee, that the person requesting membership is a fully paid-up member. Once it has been agreed a RV u3a member can join a Group, the membership list (see above) should be updated.

If the Group allows members of other local u3as to join, there are additional guidelines which are contained in the section on Shared Groups.

5.3 Registration

A Convenor should take a register of all people attending a Group meeting and this should be retained for 3 years for insurance purposes.

If a Convenor is not able to attend a meeting, they should ask another member of the Group to take the register for them.

5.4 Non-Attendance

Convenors should liaise with members who have not attended for several consecutive meetings, to establish if there are any issues relating to their Group that they should be aware of, or if they need any help.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

Convenors have the right to ask members to leave the Group if they fail to attend on a regular basis, particularly where there is a waiting list. There are no predefined rules on when a member should be asked to leave as this will depend on the Profile of the Group, the size of the waiting list and the member's personal circumstances.

5.5 Waiting Lists

If the Group is full keep, Convenors should maintain a waiting list of potential new members (This can be achieved on Beacon).

Convenors should ensure that those on the waiting list can join the Group when vacancies arise. Normally, this should be on a "first come, first served" basis. The rules may be different for a Shared Group.

5.6 Starting A Second Group

If there are sufficient people on the waiting list to start a second Group, the Convenor should discuss this with the Groups Coordinator. The Groups Coordinator will then assist in establishing a second Group.

5.7 Distribution Of Group Membership Lists

For Convenors who are not using Beacon, at least once a year (normally at the start of June) the Groups Coordinator will ask for a list of all the members and the names of the people on the waiting list.

The list of members for Shared Groups should include those members from other u3as, noting the u3a that they belong to.

The Groups Coordinator will then update Beacon on their behalf.

5.8 Non-Renewal of Membership

If a member has not renewed their membership, there is a grace period of two months during which the member is still allowed to attend Groups. After that time the member is no longer eligible to attend meetings

Convenors will be notified in early August of every year, of the need to remove from their Group those members who do not wish to renew their membership. (If using Beacon, their names will be in red on the Group Membership list.)

5.9 Problem Solving and Managing Issues

There is a section later in the Handbook that specifically addresses managing issues within the Group.

6 Communication and Interaction

6.1 Group Members

Convenors should communicate regularly with both their Group Members while complying with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation. Further details on Data Protection are provided as an appendix to this Handbook.

The recommended form of email communication with Group Members is via Beacon.

Convenors should keep members up to date with Group activities and informed of any changes or special requirements.

6.2 Website Manager

Convenors should ensure the Group information on the website up to date by communicating changes to the Website Manager. The Website Manager will ensure the Groups Prospectus is maintained.

6.3 Group Coordinator

Convenors should keep the Groups Coordinator broadly informed of how the Group is progressing and feedback any information which may affect the local or wider u3a, including complaints and grievances.

6.4 Newsletter

RV u3a publishes monthly newsletter containing Group information and details of upcoming events. This is usually distributed via email. All Convenors will be contacted on a regular basis by the newsletter editor for contributions about their Group, including recent activities and availability of spaces.

6.5 Other Convenors

Once or twice a year a Convenors' meeting will be held to discuss issues, exchange ideas, and share expertise/good practice. This will be organised by the Group Coordinator.

6.6 New Members Meeting

About twice a year, Convenors will be asked to attend New Members meetings, where they will be asked to give a very short presentation about their Group.

6.7 Communications via the RV u3a Website

The RV u3a public website has the ability to send emails to Convenors by a link in the top right-hand corner of their Group's page.

At no time will the Convenors email address be visible to the public.

When a new Convenor takes up their role, the Website Manager will ask them if they want emails relating to their Group to be sent directly to them or to be sent to the Website Manager, who will then forward them as appropriate.

7 Health and Safety

7.1 Introduction

On joining the RV u3a, members are advised that they are personally responsible for their own safety when attending Groups and main meetings; notwithstanding this, the RV u3a still has a duty of care towards its members.

All Convenors must consider the potential risks their Group activity poses. It is appreciated this varies dramatically from Group to Group (a book club in the village hall is normally less risky than rock climbing!) This Handbook provides guidance on assessing the risks of an activity based on the type of venue, with additional guidance where the Group are involved in a physical activity.

Please note: The relevant legislation is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 which does not apply to voluntary organisation. In short: everyone should use their common sense.

7.1.1 First Aiders

Groups are not required to have any trained First Aiders. Convenors should contact the emergency services if there is a serious incident.

7.1.2 Emergency Contact Details

It is recommended that Convenors have an emergency contact number for each member of their Group so that, in the event of an incident, the member's family/friend/carer can be informed. This data should be kept securely.

7.1.3 Insurance

Details of Insurance are provided as an appendix to this Handbook.

7.2 Venue Based Groups

(ie Groups meeting regularly in a public hall or similar)

Convenors should book all venues via the Hall and Venue Booking Coordinator. It will be the responsibility of the Hall and Venue Booking Coordinator to arrange for a risk assessment of the venue to take place. The risk assessments for each venue will be available on the RV u3a website via the Governance page.

Theydon Bois Village Hall (TBVH) have also provided a "Health and Safety" document, which applies when using TBVH. This is available on the Governance page of the RV u3a website and Convenors using the TBVH should be familiar with this.

7.3 Home Based Groups

'As with any people coming into your home, there is a responsibility on the part of the homeowner to make sure that your home is safe for its visitors.

The Third Age Trust advises that Convenors or hosts, holding a meeting in their home, should complete a risk assessment showing 'due diligence'. The home-based risk assessment form is provided on the RV u3a Website via the Governance page.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

Please note Convenors do not have to complete the risk assessments, but the Trust's advice is that it adds a further secure dimension to their insurance cover and perhaps most importantly reassures members wishing to attend an activity.

At a minimum the Convenor or host should consider the questions noted below. It is for the Convenor or Organiser to adapt the assessment to meet their own requirements.

Where a particular risk is identified, this should be mitigated, or the Group members should be informed.

	Questions to Consider for Home Based Groups
General	Is there enough space for all members in attendance?
	Are there any trip hazards or anything that might make members slip or fall?
	Are all walkways that members have access to kept free from obstruction?
	Are there enough seats for all members in attendance?
	Can everyone access the room? (There is no requirement to make home adaptations)
Electrical	Have you made sure there are no trailing leads or cables to prevent a member tripping?
	Have all cables in use for this activity been visually inspected to ensure they are intact /safe for use?
Fire Safety	Are all exits unobstructed?
	Is there a working smoke alarm?
Wellbeing	Are light refreshments available to members? (e.g., water)
	Have members been made aware of any pets?

7.4 Physical Activities

Convenors of Groups undertaking any form of physical activities are advised to complete a risk assessment form. This is provided on the RV u3a Website via the Governance page. Walking Groups are covered in a subsequent section.

Please note Convenors do not have to complete the risk assessments, but the Trust's advice is that it adds a further secure dimension to their insurance cover and perhaps most importantly reassures members wishing to attend an activity. It is for the Convenor or Organiser to adapt the assessment to meet their own requirements.

At a minimum the Convenor and the instructor (if appropriate) should consider the questions noted below. Where a particular risk is identified, this should be mitigated, or the Group members should be informed.

	Questions to Consider for Physical Activities
Member wellbeing and safety	Have you taken a register of attendees?
	Do you have the emergency contact details of each attendee if members are happy to provide this information?
	If outside - Have you checked the weather to ensure that it is suitable for this u3a activity to go ahead?
	Do all attendees have access to water?
	Have all attendees removed loose jewellery (if appropriate)?
	Are all attendees wearing suitable clothing/footwear?
	Have attendees appropriately warmed up?
	Have attendees had the opportunity to make the Group leader aware of any illnesses that may impact their participation and what actions should be taken if illness occurs? Note, this is not an obligation on members.
	Is there a space for attendees who need to take a break?

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

	Questions to Consider for Physical Activities
	Where applicable, is there a first aid box that is easy to access and fully stocked?
	Are attendees aware in the event of a serious incident, they should call emergency services even if there is a trained first aider present?
Activity area/ public space	Is the activity taking place in an area specifically designed for the activity (e.g. tennis court)?
	Is the activity area suitable for the activity taking place?
	Is the activity area accessible to attendees?
	Is the activity area accessible to emergency vehicles?
	Have you inspected the ground / activity area for hazards?
	Have you removed any hazards in the activity area if safe to do so?
	Are spectators a safe distance away from the activity area?
	Is there a secure area to store attendees' belongings during the u3a activity?
Equipment	Is the equipment in good condition and fit for use?
	Have attendees received a demonstration on how to use equipment correctly?
	Is there the correct equipment/vehicle to transport heavy items required for the activity (if applicable)?
	Is there a lockable storage or secure area to store equipment when not in use (if applicable)?

7.5 Walking Groups

Convenors of Walking Groups are advised to complete a risk assessment form. This is provided on the RV u3a Website via the Governance page.

Please note Convenors do not have to complete the risk assessments, but the Trust's advice is that it adds a further secure dimension to their insurance cover and perhaps most importantly reassures members wishing to attend an activity. It is for the Convenor or Organiser to adapt the assessment to meet their own requirements.

At a minimum the Convenor or walk leader should consider the questions noted below. Where a particular risk is identified, this should be mitigated, or the Group members should be informed.

	Questions to Consider for Walking Groups
Recce	Have you researched the route you will be taking to identify any hazards and/or obstacles? ?
	Have you given members an overview of the walk and the identified hazards/obstacles e.g. the number of stiles, likely boggy areas etc?
	Do members know the length and difficulty of the walk?
Traffic	Are there suitable crossing places on the road?
	Are your attendees aware they must maintain single file on road sections?
Animals	Have you notified members of any routes through fields with livestock in?
	Are dogs kept on leads in relevant areas (such as around livestock, in urban areas)?
	Are members aware of the increased risk of attack by cattle when walking with dogs?
	Is there any danger of ticks or bites/stings?
Safety	Do you have the correct equipment needed for the walk (e.g., map, compass, whistle)?
	Have you taken an attendance register?
	Do you have emergency contacts for all attendees?
	Do you have a charged phone with emergency contact details stored on it?
	Does someone know when you are expected back?
	Have members been reminded to wear appropriate footwear?
	Do you have a back marker to stay in sight and communication with Group?

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

Weather	Is there any danger you will lose visibility or mobile phone signal?
	Have members brought refreshments (such as water) for the walk?
	If applicable, is there a first aid kit?
	Have you checked the weather forecast for the day of the walk, in advance?
	Is there any danger of extreme temperatures, heavy rainfall, high wind, or otherwise severe weather?
	Have walkers brought suitable clothes and footwear, and appropriate items (such as waterproofs) for the weather?

7.6 Outings And Day Trips

Outings includes activities such as visiting museums, theatres, and cinemas

Convenors / Organisers of Outings are advised to complete a risk assessment form. This is provided on the RV u3a Website via the Governance page.

Please note Convenors do not have to complete the risk assessments, but the Trust's advice is that it adds a further secure dimension to their insurance cover and perhaps most importantly reassures members wishing to attend an activity. It is for the Convenor or Organiser to adapt the assessment to meet their own requirements.

At a minimum the Convenor or trip Organiser should consider the questions noted below. Where a particular risk is identified, this should be mitigated, or the Group members should be informed. This would include items such as "access is only by stairs" - "there is no handrails on the stairs" – "there are no WCs on the coach".

	Risk Assessment Checklist
Organising the trip	Have all the participants been given the trip itinerary and details of the travel arrangements?
Member Safety	Have the names and contact details of all the members attending been collected and stored securely?
	Have all the participants supplied the details of a person/next of kin who can be contacted in an emergency, and is this stored securely?
	Have all participants been made aware of the emergency procedures (such as what to do if someone becomes lost)?
	If applicable, is there a first aid box that is fully stocked and regularly checked?
	Have members been reminded to pack appropriate clothing/footwear for specific activities on the trip if appropriate (e.g., swimming, walking)?
	Have members been reminded to bring any items they may need (such as medication) for the trip?

7.7 Other Activities Not Covered Above

If a Group's activities are not covered in the sections above, Convenors should look at the RV u3a website (via the Governance Page) where there are additional risk assessments or contact the Groups Convenor for further advice.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

7.8 Food Safety

If Group Members are going to share homemade (or preprepared food removed from packaging or that requires refrigeration or has a limited life), the Convenor should ensure the members follow standard food hygiene protocols. Guidance on food safety is provided by the Government in their document “Providing food at community and charity events”. A copy of this is available on the RV u3a website on the Governance page.

7.9 Car Sharing

Passengers going to a RV u3a event in another members car are **not** covered by the u3a insurance

The passengers may be covered by the members personal insurance, if they have a comprehensive car insurance policy, **but do check!**

8 Sharing Groups with Another u3a

8.1 Introduction

A Shared Group is one where a member of another u3a can become a member of that Group without joining the host u3a.

If the topic of the Group is not commonly offered or if the Group needs more members, and RVu3a members have not responded to advertisements in the newsletter or other publicity, it may be appropriate to make it a 'Shared Group' with one or more other U3As.

8.2 Approval

All Shared Groups must be agreed by the Committees of ALL the u3as concerned.

If a Convenor wishes their Group to be shared, they must initially agree this with the existing members of the Group, then contact the Groups Coordinator who will take the proposal to the RV u3a Committee for approval. If approval is given, the Groups Coordinator will then contact the Groups Coordinators of one or more local u3as, it's been agreed to share with, to ask if the other u3a is willing to advertise the Group.

The Committees of the other u3as will need to approve the request. Sometimes this isn't given, usually because the u3a has a similar Group of their own which they want to safeguard.

8.3 Priority For Roding Valley U3a Members²

At the outset when the Group is recruiting new members, RVu3a members will have priority over members from other u3as.

Once the Group is established, the Convenor must ensure that a member of an outside u3a who has joined their Group won't be asked to leave if a member of RV u3a wants to join but there is no space. This means, when the Group is full, and other u3a members have been enrolled onto the Group's membership, they will not be expected to stand aside to make room for any later applications from RVu3a members.

For members on a waiting list, when a vacancy occurs, RVu3a members will have priority.

8.4 Joint u3a Groups

Occasionally a Shared Group will be shared because the Convenor belongs to two u3as and the new Group is advertised in both at the same time. If a venue is involved it's important to agree with the Committees of both u3as which u3a will be the host. The host u3a is then responsible for booking the venue, the finances of the Group and general over-sight.

8.5 Ceasing To Share a Group

At some point, a Shared Group may find that it has sufficient members from RV u3a wanting to join so that it no longer needs members from other u3as. This should be reported to the Committee via the Groups Coordinator who should then ensure that other u3as are informed. Existing members from other u3as will continue to be allowed to attend the group.

² This is in line with an agreement made between RV u3a and Epping Forest u3a in Autumn 2022.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

8.6 Confirming Membership On Non-RV U3a Members

At least annually Convenors will be asked to provide the Groups Coordinator with a list of their members (unless they are already maintaining their membership on Beacon.)

Convenors must provide the following details for non-RV members:

- Name
- Address
- Contact details (including emergency contact details if given)
- Name of u3a to which they belong and membership number

The Groups Coordinator will then record the non-RV u3a member in the Beacon Membership System as an associate AND confirm with the other u3a Groups Coordinator that they are still a current member. If they are not a current member, they must either join the appropriate u3a or they will be asked to leave the Group.

9 Financial Matters

9.1 Basic Rules

- All financial questions should be discussed with the Treasurer.
- Each Group/ activity must be self-financing. One Group cannot subsidise the activity of another Group.
- No cheques or bank transfers for a u3a activity may be paid into a personal bank account.
- Convenors must ensure that an account is kept of all money received and paid out on behalf of the Group. Any receipts and payment vouchers must be retained.
- No more than £100 in cash belonging to a Group should normally be kept in anyone's home at any given time.
- When starting a new Group, the financial arrangements should be confirmed with the Treasurer. This is particularly important when the activity is expensive (e.g. theatre trips and outings)
- Groups must not make any long-term financial agreement with any third party. All agreements must be made by the Committee.
- A Group with an annual turnover greater than £1000 must submit a copy of their accounts to the Treasurer as soon as possible after the financial year end (31 May)

9.2 Expenses Incurred to Undertake A Group Activity

Convenors must establish the cost of running a Group / activity and ensure that the members are aware how much they must contribute prior to the Group / activity commencing. This should include the costs of hiring a venue which is paid directly by the Treasurer.

Convenors must ensure all activities are paid for in advance.

If a Convenor plans to use their personal money to pay for an activity, the participants must still pay their contributions directly to the u3a. Convenors must agree with the Treasurer in advance how and when they will be reimbursed. To be reimbursed Convenors must provide the Treasurer with an expense claim approved by a Trustee, backed by the appropriate receipts.

It is the responsibility of the Convenor to ensure sufficient monies are collected to cover the cost of the activity.

A Convenor may ask the Treasurer to pay a supplier directly. The Treasurer will require sufficient evidence to support the payment and must have received the appropriate contributions from the members of the Group in advance.

9.3 Purchase Of Assets for A Group

If a Group activity requires a major item of expenditure the Convenor should notify the Groups Coordinator who will take the request to the Committee. The request should specify if the Group plan to fully fund the purchase or require assistance.

9.4 Collection Of Monies for Ongoing Activities

For ongoing activities which meet on a regular basis, monies should normally be collected every three or four months for the following period.

Where monies are paid to the Convenor by cheque, these should be sent to the Treasurer on a regular basis.

If monies are collected in cash, the Convenor may convert this to a cheque or make a bank transfer for the equivalent amount, in line with the arrangements previously made with the Treasurer.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

9.5 Sundry Expenses

Convenors can submit an expense claim to the Treasurer for legitimate expenses (e.g. postage) incurred in organising the Group. Other expenses (e.g. materials, photocopying etc..) must be covered by the Group members.

Travelling expenses will not be reimbursed.

9.6 Cost Of Refreshments

If a Convenor provides refreshments (tea, coffee, biscuits) Group members are expected to give an unasked-for contribution of 30p.

9.7 Payment For Tutors

RV u3a do not promote the use of paid tutors but will consider them in exceptional circumstances. There are strict rules about Groups paying for tutors. These are defined in the following section.

9.7.1 Third Age Trust Rules

The Trust is against having paid tutors in principle but u3as are independent charities and it does happen.

The conditions for using a paid tutor are as follows:

- 1 Paid tutors must not be a member of any u3a.
- 2 The Convenor and Committee must ensure that the tutor is self-employed, pay their own tax and have Public Liability insurance. HMRC will have issued them with a UTR (Unique Tax Reference) number which a paid tutor should be able to produce along with a copy of their Public Liability Insurance certificate as evidence that the tutor is not an employee.
- 3 Once-a-year the Convenor must check to ensure that these measures are still in place and provide evidence to the Committee
- 4 The Group using a paid tutor cannot be subsidised by the u3a.
- 5 All paid tutors must be approved by the Committee in advance.
- 6 If members want to have a Group with a paid tutor but the Committee do not agree, an option is to make the Group a non u3a activity.

9.7.2 Convenors Responsibilities

If a Convenor wants to use a paid tutor, they must first make an application to the Committee, via the Groups Coordinator demonstrating the tutor meets conditions 1 and 2 above AND that the Group will be able to meet all the tutor's costs.

The Committee must be satisfied that all the conditions have been met, before approving the use of a tutor.

Convenors must report annually to the Committee that the tutor still complies with the Third Age Trust Rules and that all their costs have been met by the Group.

10 Problem Solving and Managing Issues

10.1 Problem Solving

Sometimes issues can arise within a Group that disrupt the smooth running and can spoil the enjoyment for everyone. Convenors must not leave a problem too long before trying to resolve it. Convenors should talk to the Groups Coordinator or Committee if they are unsure how to resolve the problem or just want someone to explore options with.

10.2 Issues Between Group Members

Where there is potential for friction, it is advisable to begin by bringing it into the open. The Convenor or another person could try to facilitate a discussion either with the members concerned or with the whole Group, but it is important that the facilitator remains neutral and non-judgemental. If the Convenor cannot reach a resolution, they can informally speak to the Groups Coordinator or a member of the Committee.

Other issues a Convenor may encounter where they should seek help from the Groups Coordinator:

- A member's behaviour is regularly disturbing other members of the Group.
- There is a very serious problem in a session, and it may be necessary to ask a member to leave for the remainder of the session.
- A member who is not able to cope independently comes to a meeting without a 'carer'.

If a situation does not resolve and becomes acrimonious the Committee may need to implement their **Disciplinary Procedure** or the **Complaints Procedure**. This will depend on the nature of the issue. Both procedures are available on the RV u3a website on the Governance page.

The Difference Between A Complaints And A Disciplinary Procedure

Complaints procedure: this may include complaints from members about an issue that has arisen during a Group or relating to the management of a Group. Depending on the nature and source of the complaint, the Committee will make a decision as to how best to approach reaching a resolution.

Disciplinary procedure: this sets out how the Committee will approach problems related to a breach or suspected breach of the agreed code of conduct by a member or trustee.

The u3a office can be contacted for advice if necessary.

10.3 General Safeguarding information and guidance

It is a legal requirement of all the Charity Commissions that all u3as (and other charities) must have a safeguarding policy in place to protect their members.

"Safeguarding" refers to measures designed to protect the health, wellbeing and human rights of individuals.

- All u3a members have a responsibility to report any safeguarding concerns to their committee.
- All u3a committee members have an obligation to follow their safeguarding policy and procedure if they suspect that a member is at risk of abuse.

Guidance on Safeguarding and the actions to take are in the **Safeguarding Policy and Procedures provided on the Governance section of the RVu3a website**.

The policy and procedures are written to enable the committee and convenors to address issues where there are safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding includes incidents between members, concerns regarding abuse or neglect that a u3a member may be experiencing outside of the u3a, health related issues or previous or pending criminal convictions.

11 Accidents and Incidents

11.1 Emergencies

If an emergency incident happens during a Group activity or event, the Convenor should call the emergency services as soon as possible.

11.2 Reporting Incidents

Convenors must report all accidents and incidents to the Chair as soon as possible and complete an incident form. A copy of the form must also be provided to the Chair.

An Incident Report form is available on the RV u3a website (Contacts page) and a copy is provided as an appendix to this Handbook.

Any accident in the Theydon Bois village hall must also be reported in their accident book kept in the kitchen by the First Aid box.

11.3 Insurance

It is important to have an accurate record of all accidents and incidents in case of future problems relating to the incident. For example, if damage is caused to property by a member of the Group, take full details, as it may be the subject of an insurance claim.

The Third Age Trust provides insurance for Group activities, and although personal accident insurance cover is not provided by the Third Age Trust, the insurance does cover all u3a members. Further details (including excess levels) can be found on the u3a website and basic information is provided as an appendix to this Handbook.

12 Equipment and Resources

12.1 Background

Several Groups have acquired equipment over the past few years. The equipment is either held by the Convenor or in the cupboard in Theydon Bois Village Hall (TBVH).

RV u3a has very limited resources that can be shared between Groups. The Chair will be able to provide information on generally available resources.

12.2 Purchasing Of Equipment

If a Groups Convenor wishes to purchase equipment for their Group, they should follow the instructions in the Financial Matters Section.

12.3 Storing Of Equipment

If a Group wishes to store equipment in TBVH, they should contact the Chair to find out if there is sufficient space and obtain a key to the cupboard.

Appendix 1 Data Protection and Privacy

12.4 Introduction

All Convenors should be familiar with the RV u3a policies and statements on Data Protection and Privacy. These can be found on the RV u3a website at: <https://u3asites.org.uk/rodingvalley/page/95744> or [Roding Valley u3a: Data Protection and Privacy Policies \(u3asites.org.uk\)](https://u3asites.org.uk/rodingvalley/page/95744)

12.5 Summary Of Data Protection and Privacy Rules

The following table provides a summary of the RV u3a data protection guidelines.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The only people able to access a member's data should be those who need to communicate with or provide a service to that member.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roding Valley u3a will provide induction training to Committee Members and Convenors to help them understand their responsibilities when handling data.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Committee Members and Convenors should keep all data secure, by taking sensible precautions and following the Roding Valley u3a policies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong passwords must be used, and they should never be shared.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data should not be shared outside of the u3a unless with prior consent and/or for specific and agreed reasons. Examples would include Gift Aid information provided to HMRC or information provided to the distribution company for the Trust publications.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Member information should be refreshed periodically to ensure accuracy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members permission must be obtained, before their photographs or full names are used for publicity materials

Additional support will be available from the Third Age Trust where uncertainties or incidents regarding data protection arise.

Appendix 2 Beacon Membership System

12.6 Introduction

In May 2023, RV u3a Committee were very pleased to announce that they had moved the membership database to a system called Beacon. Beacon is the u3a movement's integrated membership, Groups, finance, and mailing system. It has been designed from the outset to be simple to use.

12.7 How Beacon Helps Convenors

Interest Groups are an important and integral part of Beacon. It allows the membership secretary to be confident that those attending Groups are members of the u3a, and it allows Convenors to keep track of their members. (Groups can include those people who want regular updates on outings etc.)

The system has a mailing feature that allows Convenors to easily email their Groups with updates and news. Beacon also has a waiting list facility, which allows Convenors to monitor when people went on the waiting list.

Beacon will include emergency contact details of Group members which can be retrieved by the Convenor or organiser using a smartphone.

A Group can also have more than one Convenor, if the management of a Group is shared and for contingency planning. A temporary leader can be nominated in the event of illness to ensure Groups are kept informed. All Convenors for a Group will all have access to the same information, so there is no need to keep multiple copies of members data or pass data between members.

Groups, like Outing, Theatre and Concerts, can maintain a Group of people who want specific email updates about forthcoming events. This is useful when there are multiple organisers.

By using the system, it also means Convenors do not have to keep members' personal data on their own electronic devices and paper lists of members details are not required.

12.8 How To Start Managing Groups on Beacon

The RV u3a Committee encourages all Convenors to use Beacon for managing their Groups' data. It is easy to learn and simple to use. All a Convenor needs is access to the internet. There is no need to download anything. If a Convenor wishes to use the system, they will be given their own login to Beacon, so they can manage their Groups, but it restricts access to other Groups.

The Beacon Administrator would be very happy to give a demonstration of the system to anyone who is interested. A try before you buy! If they convince a Convenor that Beacon is the way forward, they will then provide training sessions and ongoing support. This can be in person or over zoom.

To find out more contact the Vice Chair or email RVu3a@hotmail.com.

Appendix 3 Insurance

Convenors should be aware that the Third Age Trust has the following insurance cover for among other things:

- Public and Products Liability
- Cyber
- Tour operators
- Equipment
- Home Contents

As with all insurance policies there are limits, excesses, and exclusions.

If a Convenor is unsure if elements of their activity is covered by insurance, the details of the cover can be found on the u3a.org.uk website, under the section support for u3as. If a Convenor does not have access to this site, they should contact a member of the RV u3a Committee, who will provide them with the relevant information.

Please note that insurance does not cover, among other things:

- incidents involving children and therefore unfortunately no children can attend any RV u3a Group
- non-members or their homes (unless they are attending a tester session)
- car journeys

Appendix 4 Incident From

Incident Report Form

1 Introduction

Each incident and near miss, relating to people or property, occurring while involved in an event organised by Roding Valley u3a needs to be recorded and investigated to ensure that the facts are known and where appropriate, mitigating action is taken to reduce the chance that there is a reoccurrence of such an event. This information may also be required by the National u3a Insurers.

This form is to be completed by a member of the committee, a group convenor (or appointed deputy), or the property owner.

2 Procedures for Completing the Incident Report Form

The form should be completed as soon as practical after the incident.

The form must be sent to the Chair of the Roding Valley u3a Executive Committee. The Chair can be contacted at jlwoods4916@ntlworld.com. The form will be retained for a period of three years.

If the person completing the form does not have all the details, they should complete the form to the best of their ability and send it to the Chair, noting at the end of the form that this is an initial report and a full report will follow.

3 Your details – Person completing the form

Name	
Position	
Email	
Telephone	
Address	
Postcode	

4 Incident details

Date of incident	
Time of incident	
Where did the incident occur?	
(a) Please state the reason the injured person was at the property/site, e.g. what group/activity were they participating in, OR (b) Please state the purpose for using the damaged property e.g. a venue or equipment	

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

Please describe the circumstances of the incident:
Attach a sketch or photograph(s) if appropriate

5 Particulars of person(s) involved in the incident

(continue on a blank page if necessary)

Name	Email
Address	
Postcode	Telephone
Was he/she a member of your U3A on the date of the incident?	
Name	Email
Address	
Postcode	Telephone
Was he/she a member of your U3A on the date of the incident?	

Sections 6 and 7 are to be completed for any incident involving injury.

6 Particulars of the injured person(s)

(continue on a blank page if necessary)

Name	Email
Address	
Postcode	Telephone
Was he/she a member of your U3A on the date of the incident?	
Name	Email
Address	
Postcode	Telephone
Was he/she a member of your U3A on the date of the incident?	

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

7 Details of injury

Describe the injury/injuries
Immediate action taken
Treatment at the scene
Admission to hospital
Ongoing medical treatment

Section 8 is to be completed for any incident involving damage to property

8 Details of damaged property

Describe damage caused	
Estimated cost of repair or replacement	
Name of owner of damaged property	
Email	Telephone
Address	
Postcode	

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

The remaining sections are to be completed for all incidents

9 Name and contact details of any witnesses to the incident

(continue on a blank page if necessary)

(1) Witness:
(2) Witness:
(3) Witness:

10 Emergency Service Notification

Is this a major / serious incident:	YES NO
If so, was an emergency service been notified/requested:	YES NO
Please provide details of the services contacted and where applicable an incident number:	

11 Insurance Claim

Is the incident likely to result in an insurance claim:	YES NO
Please provide nature and value of the claim:	

12 Use of Data

The data provided within this form may be shared with the executive members of Roding Valley u3a. For major incidents and incidents involving insurance claims, the data may also be shared with the management of the Third Age Trust, their insurers and related parties, as appropriate to the circumstances. Data will be held for three years following the receipt of the last related element of data.

Roding Valley – Group Convenors Handbook

13 Declaration

Further information to follow:	Please state YES or NO
I/We declare that to the best of my/our knowledge and belief all the foregoing particulars are true and correct in all respects.	
Signed	Dated

u3a	Incident Report Form – Version Control		
Version	Description of changes / Review Body	Date	Status e.g.- draft – approved by – distributed
2.0	Updated content	20/2/2023	Draft for committee review
2.1	Updated for contact – changed to Chair	25/2/2023	Agreed with Committee 20/2/2023

Appendix 5 Role Description for a Group Convenor

See Roding Valley u3a: Group Convenors Handbook (u3asites.org.uk)

Appendix 6 Role Description for a Groups Coordinator

See Roding Valley u3a: Group Convenors Handbook (u3asites.org.uk)

Version	Description of changes	Date
0.1	Draft prepared by Laura Blake	24 04 2023
0.2	Updated for comments from J Woods	02 06 2023