

Accessibility for Disabled Members

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 your 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.
- A sound system and loop.
- Spacious enough to cope with wheelchairs/mobility scooters.
- Good lighting.
- Access to heating/air conditioning controls.

In addition consider the following:

- Making a map and directions available for new members.
- 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 or a wide doorway or a ground floor toilet or no internal stairs, and it would be very useful to know this. 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 to you, for example, could the group be hosted by that member.

COMMUNICATION

Ensure that a member of the committee takes responsible for maintaining contact with all disabled members to discover whether anything can reasonably be done by the committee to make life easier for them whilst they are participating in U3A activities. Don't assume you know the difficulties they face. Talk to them. 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 may happen to be a nominated U3A member as well and 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 other members getting involved in providing assistance which they are not insured to do.

Supporting Members with Hearing Loss

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.
- Use plain language and don't waffle.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 (see overleaf for more information).
- Check that any hearing support systems are working correctly before starting a talk.
- 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.
- Face the person you are talking to as much as possible and keep your hands away from your face when talking.
- Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking.
- 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.

EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE FOR A U3A TO BUY

Portable loop systems which range from those suitable for one to one communication and smaller systems without microphones, to those which cover an area of 8m square. Price from £75 to £1,000.

EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE FOR MEMBERS TO BUY FOR PERSONAL USE

Personal enhancers – from £60 to £350.

ADVICE AND SUPPLY OF EQUIPMENT

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) have a catalogue of products and an online shop:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop>

Telephone: 03330 144525

Textphone: 03330 144530

Email: solutions@hearingloss.org.uk

SIGN LANGUAGE SERVICES

You can book a British Sign Language interpreter through Action on Hearing Loss:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/communication-support/book-communication-support.aspx>

Telephone: 0845 685 8000

Textphone: 0845 685 8001

Email: communication.services@hearingloss.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss also provide information on learning British Sign Language:

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/your-hearing/ways-of-communicating/british-sign-language-bsl.aspx>

Telephone: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

SMS: 07800 000 360

Email: information@hearingloss.org.uk

OTHER RESOURCES

National Association of Deafened People

www.nadp.org.uk

Telephone: 0845 055 9663

Email: enquiries@nadp.org.uk

British Deaf Association

www.bda.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7697 4140

Email: bda@bda.org.uk

Hearing Link

www.hearinglink.org

Telephone: 0300 111 1113

Email: helpdesk@hearinglink.org

UK Council on Deafness

www.deafcouncil.org.uk

07903 560037

British Tinnitus Association

www.tinnitus.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 018 0527 (free); 0114 250 9922

Email: info@tinnitus.org.uk

Supporting Members with Vision Loss

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 U3A 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. The membership application form could be used to ask for this information, with an explanation of why the information is being collected and where it will go in accordance with data protection legislation.

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 conveners 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). Full contact details are below.

Equipment to Consider

There is a range of assistive technology products available, such as:

- Magnifiers: these can be hand-held or digital.
- Computer software: can be used to convert text to speech.
- Computer hardware: helps to produce documents in easy to read formats by adjusting zoom, glare, contrast and style.

- Audio-description: cinemas, museums and galleries often provide headsets with an additional narration track.
- Braille technology: to produce documents in braille.

Further information can be found through Action for Blind People (see below).

OTHER RESOURCES

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

www.rnib.org.uk

Telephone: 0303 123 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Action for Blind People

www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7635 4800 or through the RNIB helpline above.