

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 New Groups Coordinator so that you can liaise over the next steps.

Putting your idea to the membership

The New Groups Coordinator (currently also 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 Coordinator 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 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. Members might like to take it in turn to host. 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 New Groups Coordinator know of the chosen venue or if you will be using Zoom.

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 existing schedule of Redditch u3a meetings, showing when the other groups meet is on the website. 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 New Groups Coordinator 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 or be attending as a prospective member within our offer to attend one meeting only of up to three different activities before becoming a member, to ensure the group is covered by our Public Liability Insurance.

If they are not already a member of Redditch u3a, 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.

Please advise the Membership Secretary, so that she can liaise directly with any potential new member to give additional information regarding membership and the New Members' Meetings. She will also advise you of any reduction in membership fee available for part of a year's membership.

Embracing new members

A new participant 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. Please clarify whether or not they are a member of our u3a.

Be sure to take their contact details, and if they are not already a u3a member, pass these details to the Membership Secretary to follow up. She will invite them to a new Members' Meeting, give them an application form or follow them up. The application form can also be downloaded from the website.

If a regular member of your group drops out inexplicably, we ask that you follow them up to check they are not ill or dissatisfied with their u3a experience. If either is the case, please advise the Membership Secretary.

Please ensure that at any meeting, every member present is known to all others. You may like to consider the use of optional name badges.

Keeping your members informed

We ask group leaders to use our Beacon system. This is the easiest way to keep your members informed and up-to-date, and it also enables us to operate within the Data Protection Act. We will show you how to use this.

We recommend that you record attendance at your meetings. This will enable you to identify any regular member dropping out and it will also provide a record should any query arise in the future.

If you need to cancel a meeting or change arrangements at short notice, Beacon is your resource to contact your participants by email. Please also advise the Website Coordinator and ask him to add a note to this effect on your webpage.

Financing your group

- Interest groups meeting in a hired venue.

Interest groups should be self-financing. When a room is hired and refreshments provided, you will need to set an attendance fee to cover those costs.

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 1st April to 31st March. This should include any trips for which you collect money. Expenditure should be split between 'room hire costs', 'refreshments' and 'other'.

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. The Treasurer will advise you when these details are required.

- Interest groups meeting in a private home.

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.

If you do not incur any expenses other than the above, there is no need to keep accounts. When the Treasurer requests accounts at the end of the financial year, simply confirm that this is so.

Health and Safety

Wherever you meet with your group, a risk assessment should be in place, in line with our Health and Safety Policy. The template can be sent to you by the Secretary. However, we have already completed risk assessments for a number of venues, which are available on the website. For a private home, we ask that you consider the standard template but formal recording is not necessary.

Other policies are on the website and we ask group leaders to make themselves familiar with these.

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 has been set up, a publicity flyer will be drawn up by the Membership Secretary on your behalf, in consultation with you: please send her 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. This flyer will then be used to publicise your group to new and prospective members at our New Members' Meetings.

Please also send this information to the Website Co-ordinator to create a webpage for your group. Your name and email address will be used on the website as the contact for the group but your email address will not be visible. Existing webpages for other interest groups will show you how the information is used.

Please send the details of your following month's meeting to him at the same time you send it to the Newsletter Editor, so that he may keep the page up to date. It is helpful in advertising your group, if you write up short accounts of your monthly meetings and send them with the occasional photograph, participants willing, to him.

Newsletter Editor: Judith Andrews andrewsjh@btinternet.com

Website Coordinator: Steve Prosser steve.prosser10@gmail.com

Delegation

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

If possible, it is a good idea to have a backup leader, who can take over in an emergency and contact the group, for example if you are taken ill. Using Beacon makes this much easier.

Further support

Please email the New Groups Coordinator on reditchu3asecretary@gmail.com if you have any additional questions.

Committee support is always there whenever you need it and continues after you have established your interest group as the New Groups Coordinator will hand over to the Interest Groups Coordinator.

Finally

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

12/25, revised 9/26