

University of the Third Age

St Albans

Interest/Study Groups

What, How, Why, When and Where

Information for all U3A members



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

www.stalbansu3a.org.uk

Why have groups?

The U3A Trust tells us that the word university is used in its original sense of 'people coming together to share and pursue learning in all its forms'.

A U3A Trust guiding principle says: - U3As offer activities which aim to satisfy the widest possible range of interests: educational, cultural, recreational, physical and social.

Groups are a means of doing this and are at the heart of all U3As.

Groups are autonomous. The following guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive, but some useful procedures and terminology have been developed in St Albans which have proved effective for establishing and maintaining vibrant groups; these are shared below.

How are groups managed?

The U3A Groups' Co-ordinators for St Albans are facilitators. They receive and initiate ideas for groups and promote them at Tuesday meetings, on the web and in the newsletter.

They provide support and information for Group Organisers, communicating by regular emails and coffee mornings. They maintain a high profile for the groups and are the link between the groups and the Executive Committee, who receive regular reports.

Organisers

Individual groups are managed by organisers who volunteer their skills and time to help others learn.

Many groups have organisers who adopt a co-ordinating role. The members of the group take collective responsibility for the group's activities. The co-ordinators have an admin role. They are the link between the members and the U3A Groups' Co-ordinators.

H says "The good thing about being involved in a group is meeting new people with similar interests; especially good after retiring from full -time work".

A few organisers have a **leadership** style; they are members who have a body of knowledge/skills or experience. They take individual responsibility for the activities and plan the yearly programme, often after discussion with members.

How do groups start?

- **A member** may volunteer to run an interest group. They give details of the proposed group to the U3A Groups' Co-ordinators who advertise the interest and contact details. The member collects names and when the number is viable calls a meeting and launches the group. The U3A Groups' Co-ordinators add the group and contact details to the Main List of Active groups.
- U3A Groups' Co-ordinators receive **ideas** from many sources. They advertise them and collect names. When the numbers are viable -this may take weeks or months- a U3A Groups' Co-ordinator will arrange a set-up meeting, launch the group and add the details to the Main List of Active Groups.

Where are set-up meetings held?

A U3A Groups' Co-ordinator asks for someone on the list to volunteer their living room and liaises with prospective members about date and time.

What happens at a set-up meeting for a co-ordinated group?

If present the U3A Groups' Co-ordinator may chair the meeting.

It is emphasised that this group will be a co-ordinated group and members will be expected to host/research activities/visits /meetings on a rota basis.

Members introduce themselves and share any previous experience of the proposed activity and expectations of the group. Sometimes two or more groups are formed, which cover related interests.

Volunteers are sought to be the co-ordinator and assistant.

General aims, when/where of the group are agreed.

A non-attendance policy is agreed (four consecutive non-shows and the member stands down to allow others in?)

Resources, housekeeping and travel are discussed.

Procedure agreed at the meeting is circulated to all members by the co-ordinator, given to new members and reviewed annually.

(The last four points are also relevant for leader-led groups.)

Group procedure guidelines: Advice

- Agree to start group sessions on time.
- Build in an **informal review session** after a few months and then at least annually. It will help to sustain the group and ensure that members' expectations are met.
- If a **chairperson** is appointed (e.g. in discussion or self-help learning groups) make it a time limited appointment; this prevents one leadership style predominating.
- **Research buddies** help all members share researching activities. Members work in pairs to research two events. The co-ordinator may need to establish this.
- **Email buddies** for members not on email.
- **Housekeeping:** Will everyone be required to host a meeting? Policy on costs for refreshments and contributions towards petrol(see page 16)

Organiser C provides an attractive A4 hand-out for all new members; detailing the agreed procedure for that group.

What is expected from a Group Organiser?

- Confirm that all members of the group are happy for their details to be stored and shared electronically with other members- for security always use **bcc**
- Give all members of the group an electronic copy of the group list; keep this up to date.
- Provide U3A Groups' Co-ordinators with an electronic copy of member's details and send annual updates.
- Construct a group email (help is available for this).
- Collect members' contributions and form a programme.
- Annually, check that membership numbers are active. Only U3A members can join groups and insurance can be invalidated if non-members attend more than twice (further advice available from U3A Groups' Co-ordinators).
- Organise review sessions.
- Keep a register of attendance.
- Notify and remove non-attenders according to group agreed practice.

- Follow current accident procedures.
- It is strongly recommended that emergency details/medication details of all members are kept. This is essential for active groups. (If confidentiality is an issue a sealed envelope containing relevant details could be carried by the member and only opened in an emergency).
- Keep a waiting list.
- When waiting list numbers are viable, start another same-interest group. U3A Groups' Co-ordinators are pleased to help if asked.
- Send a representative to the organisers' coffee mornings where developments, triumphs and problems can be shared.

Organiser J sends a welcome email to the new members; includes her photo and suggests a meeting place at the next Tuesday meeting.

- Update details of the group held on the web.
- Send the same information to the U3A Groups' Co-ordinators for inclusion in the Portfolio.

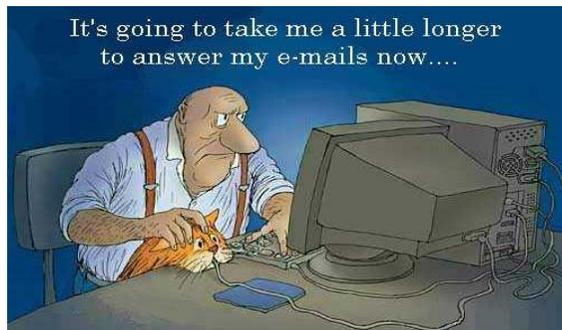
- Keep a record of the group's activities and any useful details like travel research. Same-interest and new groups can then benefit from shared experiences.

St Albans U3A Data Protection

Data must be obtained directly from each member of the group and not from central sources (however information can be checked with Groups' Coordinators or the responsible trustee.)

Only data which is needed for the needs of the group should be kept.

Until all members of the group agree that their data can be shared it is recommended that **bcc** (blind copy) is used when sending emails; subsequently, the group can decide what level of confidentiality they prefer.



What happens if a group has vacancies?

On request, the U3A Groups' Co-ordinators will advertise the vacancies for a period of time-on the web, via emails and at Tuesday meetings through the Group News.

Waiting lists

It is in the spirit of the U3A that members should be in groups of their choosing as soon as possible. Therefore all groups are expected to have a waiting list.

As soon as numbers are viable, another group should be started. The U3A Groups' Co-ordinators are pleased to help.

The last- formed multiple same-interest group holds the *main* waiting list for that activity. This allows a new group to be formed more quickly.

Members may wish to join a specific same-interest group for reasons of date/time/personnel. Individual group waiting lists can accommodate this.

W says "several groups were full when I joined, but fortunately a new group was formed quite quickly from the new members on the waiting list. This was really good for a keen new member."

How do members join a group?

Contact the organiser using the telephone number found in the newsletter or on the Main List of Active Groups or News displayed at Tuesday meetings.

The organiser knows about vacancies and the waiting list.

On request U3A Groups' Co-ordinators can provide a current master list of groups and an organiser's email.

H says "I enjoy belonging to U3A groups because there is no pressure to perform and I can sit back and enjoy learning in a relaxed atmosphere with friendly people."

Problems

It is not the organiser who has the problem; it is the *group*!

The organiser could call a meeting and confront the issues. The U3A Groups' Co-ordinators are always available for a chat and have a flyer 'When Problems Occur' available on request.

Organiser R sent out an anonymous questionnaire about the group's activities, which was returned by post. It informed the future programme.

Members who have disabilities

The Third Age Trust gives the following advice.

"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 activities/events. Should the situation arise where a member wishes to attend an interest group or activity, but is worried that he/she would not be able to participate fully without help, The Third Age Trust has extended its liability insurance policy to cover the attendance of a companion/carer. It is hoped that by doing this, members in this situation will continue to be able to enjoy the full benefits of U3A membership."

Attendance with a carer could be a way forward for members with physical **and** mental disabilities. Then everyone can enjoy the Savill Gardens!



Insurance

The Third Age Trust (TAT) provides legal liability insurance on behalf of members. The most common way in which liability to another person can arise is in the case of *negligence*.

Insurance is not the same as personal accident insurance. In the case of an accident where there is no legal liability, the TAT insurance does not come into play.

Members of more active groups should be asked to sign an understanding to show that they appreciate the above situation and that they participate at their own risk.

Organisers have a duty of care and need to assess potential hazards e.g. researching walks and having a back-marker.

Advice sheets on insurance and status of visitors are available on request from U3A Groups' Co-ordinators.

Accidents

After an accident, a full report must be entered on the accident form (all organisers have a copy). This must be sent to the U3A secretary within three days to conform to insurance regulations.

Finance

The U3A is a charity and bound by the Charity Commission rules, which are legally enforceable. The U3A treasurer can advise.

Paid tutors cannot be employed, unless they have Public Liability Insurance; the U3A does not have Employers Liability Insurance.

Each group is self-financing and costs for photocopying etc. need to be distributed among members.



A walking group takes a break

L says "I do have to rein myself in; so much choice of groups, but only so many days in the week."

Useful information

Help

The U3A Groups' Co-ordinators have the following sheets available:

- Ground Rules for Discussion Groups.
- Sustaining your Group
- If Problems Occur
- Walking Groups
- Data Protection Advice
- Insurance and Status of Visitors

Venue Hire- web sites with details of local venues for hire

The Centre for Voluntary Service

www.cvsstalbans.org.uk publications - Really Useful Spaces

www.hertsdirect.org/your-community/comvol/venue2

There is a hard copy for browsing at Tuesday meetings.

Please let the U3A Groups' Co-ordinators know if there are any additions, amendments or recommendations.

Travel

If a group agrees that contributions towards petrol costs will be made, the following site could be useful.

www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/running_costs

London Route Planner

www.journeyplanner.org is Transport for London's route planner. Routes can be planned selecting individually chosen forms of transport. It provides useful information about buses; the stop 'letter' and a map of the stop location.



T says "Since I joined the Bus Pass and History groups, I have visited many parts of London I never knew existed. I would never have discovered them on my own."

Reduced-price computer software

Computer software at educational prices (considerable discount) is available to U3A members at:-
www.software4students.co.uk

When ordering fill in The University of the Third Age BR1 1QE as the educational establishment.

Computer Repairs

There may be a local recommended repair contact; check with the IT Organiser or U3A Groups' Co-ordinators.



Members relax during a computer class

IT courses

Computer courses are run for all abilities and cover a variety of topics. Help is also available for group organisers in setting up group emails and developing their IT skills.



N says "I had never used a computer before I went on a U3A computer course for beginners. Now I am really confident using emails and the Internet and even did some shopping online; it's really fun!"

Photocopying

The CLA licence covers extracts from any book, journal or magazine up to 5%, one chapter or one article, whichever is the greater, but NOT printed music, newspapers or maps.

Free resources from:

www.u3a.org.uk - The Resource Centre

This is the national Third Age Trust (TAT) site. It has a wealth of information and resources that can be borrowed for free.

The Groups' Co-ordinators have a hard copy of the Index available at Tuesday meetings.

The TAT site has information on shared learning projects and summer schools.

TAT Subject Co-ordinators are specialists who offer a subject advisory service through telephone or email.

- The Open University
- Central Library St Albans
- The Internet- use Google

Virtual U3A

The on-line U3A might be of interest to members confined to home. www.vu3a.org

Could YOU be a Group Organiser?

S says "I enjoy being a Group Co-ordinator because you get to meet lots of people with similar interests; it's a great opportunity to share knowledge, drink tea and eat cake!"



Ashridge

M says "Since becoming a Group Co-ordinator I have been to places I would never have visited on my own and learnt so many interesting things."

J says "I enjoy being a Group Leader because I learn as much from the other members of my group as I am teaching them."

Groups are fun: Start one! Join one!



