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## Notes for Group Leaders

These notes are to help anyone who is thinking of setting up a new interest group or who takes on the leadership of an established group (“Group Leader Responsibilities”).

Other sources of information: the U3A Trust [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) has issued an Advice Sheet (Advice Sheet 14 For Group Leaders/Co-ordinators/Facilitators) which can be found on the U3A national website in the Members Area under Document Downloads, Group Leaders (you will have to Log In to the Members Area). The Thames Valley Network [www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk/](http://www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk/), of which we are members, organises Study and Training Days that may be helpful for Group Leaders.

While you may wish to use your own e-mail address for sending information to your Group’s members there is also a central e-mail account which can reach over half the Full and Associate Members – contact the Communications Co-ordinator. There is a website editor allocated for each group who can also give training on adding information to the website. The Group Leaders’ Coordinator has a list of available locations for groups with prices to hire for their meetings. (also see *Where we meet* on the website).

Contact information for the Risborough U3A committee etc. can be found in PReVIEW. Key contacts are the Treasurer, the PReVIEW editor, the website editors, the Membership Secretary, the Communications Co-ordinator and the Group Leaders’ Coordinator. See the Group Leaders Cribsheet for details – copies available from the Group Leaders’ Coordinator or Communications Co-ordinator.

### Setting up a new group?

#### A new idea?

If you have an idea for a potential interest group, ask around to see if any others share your enthusiasm. It is a good idea to talk to a member of the committee or the Chair as they may know if it has been tried before. The Membership Secretary also asks new members what their interests are and may be able to point to possible interested parties.

Useful information is available on the U3A website ([www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)) including start-up leaflets in some subjects, online course materials and free study material. You will need to log on to the Members Area (create an account if you don’t already have one). For the Advice Sheets (including one for Group Leaders) go down to Document Downloads and then to Advice Sheets. There are subject support specialists available to help with some subject areas. The U3A Resource Centre can be contacted on 020 8315 0199. There are also online courses, study days and summer schools which may provide a stimulus for the group.

To promote the new group:

- Make use of PReVIEW as this goes to all members in the Autumn and the Spring. The deadlines for copy will be notified to Group Leaders by the PReVIEW editor, but are currently September and March.
- Use the U3A Risborough e-mail and contact database (contact the Communications Officer to send an email to all members who have email addresses).
- At the monthly general meetings, put a noticeboard in the clubroom – be sure you get it up early so you catch people as they come in.
- Speak at a monthly meeting to invite others to express interest.
- Put information on to the website by contacting the Website Manager. Once you have some expressions of interest, set up an introductory meeting at the venue of choice (Venue list from Group Leaders' Coordinator.)

Most groups run for two hours with a break in the middle and they meet monthly on a specific day. Look through the monthly programme to identify a time slot that does not conflict with a popular group or likely similar interest. It is a good idea to select this time for your introductory meeting as well. Contact the person responsible for taking bookings for the venue that seems most likely to suit the expected size of the group, to find out if the chosen time-slot is available. Some small groups meet in members' homes. A few groups meet in other specific locations such as PR School Community Sports Centre, the Aylesbury record office, or the library.

At the introductory meeting, discuss how the group will run and what will be expected of members. As a potential leader, do not over-commit yourself, but decide how much time/expertise you will realistically be able to offer. Use this meeting to set some objectives for the group and find out the expertise among the members of the group as well as discussing the practicalities of when and where to meet and what it will cost per meeting. It is a good idea also to do a mini session relating to the subject if appropriate.

Once the venue is booked you need to be prepared to arrive first and leave last and ensure that venue conditions are met.

## **Group leader responsibilities**

### **1. Membership of the group**

Keep a register of attendance at each meeting.

Do check that everyone is a fully paid up member of the U3A (they should be wearing the correctly coloured name badge). Call the Membership Secretary if you are not sure. Take telephone numbers or e-mail so you can let people know of any last minute changes or just keep them in touch with what is going on if they have to miss a few sessions. (Note: if you e-mail your Group members you should include U3A in the subject line and send the e-mail out bcc.) Ask your Group's members to let you know if they cannot make a meeting or if they decide to leave the group.

Introduce new members and encourage them to integrate within the group.

Encourage everyone to take an active part in the group.

### **2. Continue to publicise the group**

PReVIEW is produced twice a year and each group should have some information in there. It may be a general statement about what happens at the meetings along with contact information or it may be a list of the planned programme for the next few months.

Send information about the activities of your group to your Website Editor to put on the website (see the Group Leaders Cribsheet from the Group Leaders' Coordinator to find out which one is yours). This includes your future programme (which you can update yourself once you have been given access) and reports of past activities (which can include photographs). Be sure to update the website with any changes from any programme that has been published in PReVIEW. Some copies of the monthly activities list is available at the monthly meeting for members without email. **It is the Group Leaders responsibility to ensure that information on the website about their Group, especially future events, is correct** (although they can delegate this to a member of the Group).

Group Leaders' meetings are held twice a year and are an opportunity to discuss issues relating to group management and publicity. There is useful information under the Group Leaders' tab on the website ([www.risboroughu3a.org.uk](http://www.risboroughu3a.org.uk)).

The Group Leaders' Coordinator produces a rolling schedule of outings and trips for the next twelve months to ensure that Groups and the Social Committee do not arrange events that clash with each other. This is circulated by e-mail to Group Leaders for them to share with their groups and is also published on the website.

### **3. Expenses**

You need to keep a careful record of income and outgoings and retain receipts for any expenses incurred. Charges for the meetings should be appropriate – to cover refreshments, any materials, room hire, etc. Paid expertise should only be used exceptionally. If there are set-up costs for a new group, then apply to the Treasurer who may be able to provide initial funding (which you can repay from monthly subs if required to).

You must report the balance to the Treasurer at the end of August and the end of February. Advice is available if required.

### **4. Record of activities**

It is useful to keep a record of what the group has done and feedback from members on speakers, activities, visits made or topics covered. This is not only helpful for you to plan future activities but also for whoever takes over from you as leader.

### **5. Housekeeping**

You are responsible for ensuring that the venue for meetings is booked and you need to be prepared to arrive first and leave last and check arrangements for keys, refreshments and any other Health and Safety issues.

Non-U3A members who go on our trips are not covered by insurance. If you are concerned you should get a disclaimer (especially for children). The Coach company's insurance may cover the journey but not the destination.

First aid - A pocket sized guide is available from [www.sja.org.uk/sja/support-us/the-difference/get-a-free-first-aid-guide.aspx](http://www.sja.org.uk/sja/support-us/the-difference/get-a-free-first-aid-guide.aspx)

### **6. Outings and visits**

When organising outings and visits the following guidelines may be helpful:

- When making an initial enquiry, check days when visits are welcome especially if using guides, check minimum and maximum numbers and whether a group visit is available on a normal open day.
- It is recommended that the organiser visits the property - let the House or Gardens etc. know that this is intended and a special time may then be arranged. Check suitability for those with disabilities. Take guidance from the destination.
- Check what refreshments can be offered. Special dietary requirements must be arranged in advance. Remember smaller venues may have few facilities.

- Get back with a couple of dates and be prepared to be flexible.
- Members on outings often welcome a coffee/tea on arrival especially after a coach journey.
- Lunches can be limited and tickets indicating what has been ordered can help with organisation.
- If tea is arranged in the afternoon and cake is offered have one ticket price to cover it and show clearly what is included.
- Ensure all administration is in writing and check/ confirm the booking early with the numbers. Large numbers may require an extra guide.
- A pro-forma for trips and visits is available from the Group Leaders' Coordinator.
- Pass on all information if someone else takes over, including In Case of Emergencies details for those travelling.
- When travelling use a mobile phone to let the destination know if you are likely to arrive early or late.

## **7. Support for the wider group**

All Groups are expected to make and serve the refreshments at the monthly meetings on a rota basis. (The rota can be found on the website under the Group Leader tab.) Groups are asked to support various activities during the year, such as presentations at the AGM, meetings for new members and other internal events. The U3A also supports some local activities such as the Risborough Festival and group members are encouraged to help with these events.

Group leaders are responsible for ensuring that Associate Members in their Groups are kept informed of social events and other items that might be mentioned at the monthly meetings. They can remind members of the need for volunteers for such tasks as the chair rota or committee membership. Associate members who are prepared to undertake these jobs are eligible for full membership.

Leading a group can be both challenging and enjoyable, but above all it should provide an opportunity for learning about something in which you are interested.

## **8. Change of Group Leader**

When you hand over to a new Group Leader or change your venue you need to inform the Group Leaders' Coordinator who will pass the information on to other key contacts.