



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR GROUP CONVENORS

November 2016

1. Why Start a Group?

- The purpose of U3As is to provide opportunities to continue learning, through the sharing of knowledge and experience of their members. These in turn encourage social interaction and development of new friendships based on common interests. Interest and activity groups are formed according to the wishes of their members.
- The Group Convenors play a vital role in providing an appropriate environment for learning and enjoyment.
- A wide range of groups can be found in our U3A and a variety of approaches to learning and associated social events are used by our Group Convenors. These may include formal lectures or speakers, organised and structured programmes of learning, educational / interest outings or even fieldwork trips.

2 How Can I Get a Group Going?

- If you have an idea for a new group, or you hear of someone else who has, there may be other members who would like to join in exploring a particular subject. In the first instance, contact the Interest Groups' Coordinator or a Committee Member who will help you work out if your idea is viable and then help to determine ways to publicise initial concepts.
- The time and location of a new group can be important, so consult the Groups' Coordinator about possibilities. In theory, interest groups can meet with any frequency and may be of fixed duration, or open-ended. Practically the availability of a room or suitable venue will probably be an important consideration. The Interest Groups' Coordinator will be able to advise you on possible venues if members own homes are not appropriate and any associated costs involved.

□ Please note that you *must* be a U3A member to be a group Convenor otherwise you are not covered by U3A insurance.

3. How Do I Organise the First Meeting?

□ If you feel that you would like help to get your group started do contact the Interest Groups' Coordinator or a Committee Member who will assist you at the first meeting.

□ Ensure that the members of the group agree about how the group will work and who will be helping to organise and run it. It should not be assumed that the role of Convenor is to do all the work! As a potential new Group Convenor you will need to consider what you can reasonably offer in terms of time and commitment.

□ Key issues should be agreed at this stage including:

How much participation is expected from members, how often will the group meet and what will be the size of the group? Will the group Convenor lead all the sessions and how should sessions be structured? Often this will evolve as time goes by.

Is specialist tuition required, for example as in yoga? Try to find out what knowledge and experience exists in the group. A mix of methods and styles is known to work well for most members.

□ You might also want to have a look at the range of publications and subject advisers available from the Third Age Trust (TAT). For this you will need to first create a U3A member user account via the Trust web site at:

<http://www.u3a.org.uk/>

4. What Must I Do To Successfully Run a Group?

- Your first meeting will have determined responsibilities for requirements such as booking rooms and publicity but it will be a good idea to also have nominated back-ups. As the Group Convenor you will need to keep a diary of agreed meetings and if you have agreed to meet say every 4th Thursday of the month you may want to send out email reminders if there are 5 Thursdays in a particular month! People will confuse 4th with last.
- For meetings at members houses you may wish to check out any possible parking restrictions if near the town centres and encourage members to car share. In the case of car sharing contributions can be made by members to pay for agreed fuel costs.
- Once your Group is established, as a Convenor you can obtain a 'Beacon' account with which you can set up details of group members, venues and planned meetings. You can then use Beacon to email group members details of future events or other relevant information. Please contact the WU3A Webmaster or Chairman for more information on Beacon.
- You should provide details of future meetings to the WU3A Webmaster. If you do not know how to do this, please contact the Groups' Coordinator who will have provided information about your group on the website. Summaries and, if appropriate, photographs of past meetings will be useful input to our website, increasing awareness for both existing and potential members.
- You may also wish to send a short description of upcoming events to the Newsletter Editor and, as appropriate, reports on activities which have taken place.
- When a new member wishes to join your group do check that they are a paid up member of U3A as this can have insurance

implications (If your group is open to other U3As in the NE Cheshire Network ask to see membership cards).

If you need to indicate that the group is full, please let the Groups' Coordinator know. Then the possibility of forming an additional group can be investigated, if this seems appropriate.

How Can I Book a Meeting Room?

If your group needs to book a room for a meeting or event then don't sign any rental agreement yourself. You should contact the Groups' Coordinator for advice on possible options available and costs. A list of existing group venues is maintained in the Beacon system

You should ensure that all rooms are booked as agreed with the Groups' Coordinator and that the costs have also been agreed with the Treasurer in order that your group is insured and the invoices will be paid.

If you need to change or cancel a room booking for any reason you must inform the Groups' Coordinator as soon as possible, in order that U3A is correctly charged.

Members of groups are expected to help with the setting-up and tidying-up of rooms used and with the provision and clearing-up of refreshments. These are not tasks which the Group Convenor should always undertake.

5. What If I Need to Relocate My Group?

If you decide that you wish to relocate your group you should keep to the following procedures.

You should consult members and report the proposal to Groups Coordinator with numbers of those who wish to move

and those that do not. Those who do not wish to relocate will be supported in finding another Group Convenor.

- You should ensure that the proposed venue meets any storage requirements and Health and Safety regulations, as required for insurance purposes.
- You must bring the proposal to the Committee for approval, as this is essential for insurance

6. How Do I Obtain Equipment Required For My Group Meeting?

- WU3A has a variety of equipment for presentation use including a portable PA system, a laptop projector and projector screen. There is also funding available for any other capital expenditure required to support activities but not consumables e.g. we could buy a table tennis table but not the ping pong balls
- In the first instance speak to the Groups Coordinator who can help you in the following ways :-
 - Give you a list of what is available.
 - Arrange for advice and training on the use of equipment.
 - Arrange, through the committee, for the purchase of new equipment.
- Use of Own Equipment - Group Convenors and members are responsible for the electrical safety of any of their own equipment that they use during U3A meetings.

7. What Administration Needs Are Required?

Membership cards

Please ask your group members to show their membership cards on a regular basis. If non-members are attending classes you and they are not insured. Checking cards has brought to light a surprising number of people attending who are not members!

Group Members' Details

At any venue the Group Convenor should compile a register with contact details (e-mails and telephone numbers) of all those who attend their group's activity. This is essential in the case of an emergency and to comply with insurance requirements.

Convenors of walks and outings should also make a list of the names of those in the group at the start of the walk or outing in case of accident or emergency.

You will need to lodge a copy of your register on an annual basis with the Groups' Coordinator, who will also answer any queries you may have about the administration and record-keeping. This is helpful to allow your group members to be contacted in case of emergency.

If your group is full please keep a list of those who enquire about your group so you can inform them when a vacancy occurs. If you have a number of people waiting for your group please inform the Groups Coordinator.

Data protection

Requests for non-group members contact details should only be made in an emergency. You must contact a Committee member who will find the information for you.

8. Money Matters – What Should I Know?

Joint transport

□ Where transport is in shared cars, passengers should volunteer to contribute to the driver's costs -currently at the rate of £1.50 for each 10 miles, or part thereof, of the journey.

Social Events

□ Social Events such as theatre or concert visits, trips, holidays and lunches are costed to be self-financing. If planning to organise an event of this type for the first time, please contact a member of the Social Events group for advice.

Payment of speakers

□ One-off visiting speakers may be paid for their presentations but are usually financed by the group. You must discuss this with the Treasurer beforehand.

Expenses

□ Group Convenors should not be out of pocket as a result of running a group. The Treasurer will provide a Claim Form for your use. Please attach receipts or other proof of expenditure (e.g. millage for travel).

□ Before incurring costs other than minor expenses such as photocopying, please discuss these with the Groups' Coordinator and the Treasurer who, if funds permit, will do their best to help for example in the purchase of equipment or books for the use of your group.

□ A charge of £1.00 may be collected from members meeting in another member's home to be retained by the host towards the costs of providing accommodation and refreshments. If this does not cover the home Group Convenor's costs or there are any surplus funds please contact the Treasurer.

□ An annual return of expenditure must be provided to the Treasurer including if appropriate a 'nil return'.

9. Will I Have Any Insurance Cover?

Public Liability

□ As a member of the Third Age Trust, Wilmslow U3A and its members are covered by public and products liability insurance but for Third Party only. Individual members, who think they may be at additional risk, might want to check the cover provided by their own insurance policies. Personal accident insurance cover is not provided by The Third Age Trust.

□ Educational trips (not holidays) involving overnight stays are covered. Before any arrangements are made, however, they must be approved and the financial details sorted out. Contact the Treasurer before arranging finances for a group outing.

□ Non-members can attend a class or outing as a guest or potential member for one occasion only and after this must become a member of Wilmslow U3A in order to be insured. Failure to apply this requirement may invalidate insurance for the whole group.

□ There is no formal U3A requirement to carry out risk assessments for any regular workshop activity using tools or materials. However some venues may require the completion of a written risk assessment as part of their insurance requirements. You should contact the Groups' Coordinator if you need any advice.

□ A checklist for Walks Convenors is advisable and routes should be checked beforehand. Any hazards should be notified to the group beforehand with group members then deciding if they wish to participate based on this knowledge

10 How Do I Keep the Group Going?

Flexibility of groups

□ The flexibility and fluidity that is their greatest advantage can also be a disadvantage, as there tends to be a natural cycle to the existence of interest groups.

□ Interest groups are self-motivating, so they can be difficult to maintain over lengthy periods. They arise, continue, and cease, as dictated by their members. In time there may be some falling-off of interest, involvement or commitment.

Shrinking Groups

□ If you think that your group could benefit from some new members you could advertise in the Newsletter or write an article for the Newsletter about the activities of your group.

□ If your group is shrinking please try to find out why this is happening. It may be a problem of timetable clash or the venue or content.

□ Please review the situation with your group members and also contact the Groups Coordinator or a Committee Member if you want to talk it over.

□ Occasionally groups have run their course and finish when the members feel that they have done enough. Sometimes these groups can be revitalised and started again at a later date.

11 What Support Sources Are Available?

North West Region

- The North West Region has contacts and resources to help you in running your group.
- Their web-site provides information on additional backing for local networks to ensure active support for their Group Convenors.
- This may take the form of briefing sheets, study days, information exchange meetings, training days and so on.

Third Age Trust -U3A Resource Centre

- The Third Age Trust is the national body for all U3As and this has developed considerable expertise in supporting U3As in their learning activities.
- These are available from The Resource Centre, Third Age Trust: resource.centre@u3a.org.uk.
- They have a range of materials available for U3A groups to borrow free of charge, except for the cost of return postage. There are, for example, slides, videos, audio cassettes, CDs and DVDs available in many subject areas.

'Third Age Matters' and 'Sources'

- A number of U3A subject advisers are available at the Third Age Trust. Their contact details can be found in each issue of Third Age Matters which you receive as a member. These advisers can provide leaflets and advice.
- 'Sources' is the national educational journal of U3As. Each issue has a subject focus, and is published by TAT several times a year. This is also sent out with 'Third Age Matters'.
- A number of on-line courses are also available on the national web-site.

12 How Do I Give Up My Group Convenor Role?

- When a group has run for a while the you may feel that they would like a rest or a change.
- Talk to your group and see if anyone in the group or a small group of members in the group would like to take over.
- If no-one volunteers then please contact the Groups Coordinator who will advise on the next course of action. This may be to advertise in the Newsletter or to take some other course of action.

But always remember:

You are the life blood Group of your U3A - without you there wouldn't be one!

So on behalf of the U3A movement – thank you.

13 Useful contacts as of November 2016

Wilmslow U3A Committee

Chair David Simmons

Tel: 01625 536847 email david.simmons1@btinternet.com

Secretary Pauline Bushnall

Tel: 01625 531753 email: pauline6633@talktalk.net

Membership Secretary Caroline Mangnall

Tel: 01625 526010 email: cmmangnall@gmail.com

Treasurer Christine Foreman

Tel: 01625 530007 email: caforeman22@hotmail.com

Groups' Coodinator Maurice Palin

Tel: 01625 535841 email: mgpalin@btinternet.com

Webmaster John Cookson

Tel: 01625 582132 email: johncookson@brooklane.net

Newsletter Editor Cherry Dolden

Tel: 01625 522379 email: cherrydolden@btinternet.com

Third Age Trust

Third Age Trust Tel: 020 8466 6139

web site: www.u3a.org.uk

National Office, The Third Age Trust, The Old Municipal Buildings, 19 East Street, BROMLEY, BR1 1QE.