

## INTEREST GROUP CONVENORS

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **What is a Convenor?**

A Convenor is a member of Blackbourne U3A who takes the lead role in an interest group, ably assisted by other group members as required, to ensure the continued success of the group. No qualifications are required to lead a group but knowledge of and/or experience of the subject is an advantage but not essential. Anyone can do it and it is great fun, as you all enjoy an activity together.

#### **How does a new group get started?**

In two main ways: like minded members agree to get together to discuss a way forward, plan future activities and agree who will do what. Or, someone with a particular interest tries to form a group, has a clear idea of an initial programme and gets approval from group members to lead it, with help as required.

If you are interested to start a new group, advertise your intention through the Interest Groups' Coordinator, who is usually a named member of the committee. Choose a meeting time and place, (the Coordinator may be able to help you find a spare time slot), a group name, and ask the Coordinator to publicise this for you, and provide a contact name and telephone number for anyone interested.

At your first meeting, members can discuss and agree a way forward for the group with proposed activities and a future agreed meeting time and place. Do you want to meet in members' houses on a rota, in your house, or do you wish to hire a meeting room, or simply meet outside at an agreed location each time?

#### **Is it OK to start a second group if an existing group is full?**

Yes, this is encouraged. The most popular activity in U3A nationally seems to be walking and many U3As have several different walking groups to cater for the high demand. Try to ensure that the new group day and time do not conflict with the existing group's activities but this is not always possible. The Groups Coordinator may be able to advise on this.

#### **If our new group needs to buy materials or hire a room can we get initial financial help?**

The principle is that all groups are financially self sufficient in the long term but the committee will consider requests for help with start-up costs.

#### **How can we ensure that room hire costs are always covered?**

If you need to hire a room regularly the best way to cover costs is probably to ask for payment from members to cover a 6-8 week period, or similar. This guarantees room costs are covered no matter how many members turn up each time. And members are more likely to turn up if they have already paid. Consider a summer break in activities as numbers may drop off as members take a holiday. Be flexible.

#### **Once our group is established what else do we need to think about?**

The success of a group depends on the regular attendance and input from its members. If some members never show up and you have a waiting list of people wanting to join your group, contact the absent member(s) to ask if they are ill, or if their interest has waned. It may be that you can release a place for someone on the waiting list.

You should tell the Groups' Coordinator

- when vacancies exist so she/he can advertise the fact on the BU3A website and in the newsletter
- when you have a waiting list so she/he can consider the need for the

- formation of an additional group
- when one of your members dies, so that no insensitive contact is made with their family
- of any changes in your group's name or format, or meeting time or place
- if the group should fail and cease to meet

### **If we receive money from and spend it on behalf of our members, what records should we keep?**

If your group structure and activity is such that no money is involved there are obviously no financial records to be kept. Quite a lot of groups have no financial commitments.

If you do have financial incomings and outgoings then keep simple records of this with details of payments and receipts. It's a good idea to let your group have an annual summary of the financial affairs but if sums are small this may not be necessary. A member of your group may volunteer to do a simple bit of record keeping; it's up to the group to decide who does what.

Try not to keep too much cash in hand, - some groups insist on cheques only as this makes record keeping easier.

If your group has an annual turnover greater than £300 for example, you may think it preferable to open a group bank account. If your group opens a bank account, it must be in the name of the group, with a minimum of two cheque signatories, and with two to sign. The two signatories must not be related.

### **Do we have to make any returns to our BU3A Treasurer?**

At the end of the financial year, our Treasurer may ask groups with an annual turnover greater than £1000 for a copy of their accounts. This is not onerous and simple records are the best; our Treasurer is on hand for help and advice.

### **Is our Group covered by any insurance for its activities?**

TAT provides a helpful guidance document on insurance for U3As and this can be found on our website. This should answer any queries you have.

The Third Age Trust, (TAT) has arranged a central insurance policy for all paid up members of affiliated U3As in the UK. The policy insures members against Public Liability and Product Liability claims made against them. The policy does not provide cover against Personal Accident.

In the rare event of an accident we must record a few details about it and an Accident Report Form can be downloaded from the BU3A Website. Send the completed form to the Chairman. Equipment belonging to the BU3A is also insured. The Treasurer can advise you on the terms of the insurance.

### **Are Non-U3A-Members allowed to sample our activities and are they insured?**

Yes, non-U3A-members may attend a limited number of monthly meetings as a visitor and be covered by our insurance. Similarly a non-member may attend an Interest Group, (with Convenor permission), to see if they like an activity, prior to their applying to join BU3A.

The Third Age Trust guidance suggests non-member attendance is limited to 3 visits per year maximum for both monthly meetings and for group activities. Beyond that they must join or be put on a waiting list to join and no further attendance allowed in that year until they are a member.

Convenors are asked to monitor the situation, to ensure the attendance as a non-member does not continue indefinitely, as this may compromise our insurance cover.

**Does Insurance cover Social trips?**

Some groups arrange Social Trips for their members, (Garden visits, Educational trips, Theatre trips). Where these trips are run on a private basis, the BU3A insurance will not apply, and it is the responsibility of the organiser to make all necessary arrangements, including Group Trip Insurance, if this is required.

Where trips are run under the umbrella of BU3A, either at home or abroad, they should follow the same guidelines used by the BU3A Travel Groups, namely that any BU3A non-members only participate on the 3 group attendances per year guidance. Where the same non-U3A-members persistently attend BU3A trips, this may compromise insurance cover for the entire group on that trip should a claim arise.

Travel groups usually book holidays through companies which are members of ABTA, this provides certain safeguards but personal travel insurance is still required.

**Are we supposed to have First Aiders in our Group?**

There is no requirement on any group to include a First Aid qualified member, or to hold, or carry, a First Aid kit. There are no recommendations as to what a First Aid kit, if held, might include. However, some Convenors do carry a basic First Aid kit during walks for example, so if you'd feel more comfortable then take a basic kit with you.

If a member needs urgent medical attention however, your group should contact Emergency Services, who will advise the caller on any immediate action thought necessary, and who will manage emergency recovery.

**Can our Group use BU3A equipment?**

Yes of course, subject to availability and provided you have the skills to work it! Contact the Chairman about this.

**Do you want news of our activities?**

Yes we most certainly do, - all Interest Groups are encouraged to submit articles, reports and photographs of group activity, for publication in our newsletter, and on the website.

**What if we need further advice?**

Interest Groups are the lifeblood of our U3A and the Committee will help and advise about setting up a new group if asked. Contact our Groups Coordinator, or Chairman, or ask an experienced Convenor for advice as required.

Blackbourne U3A website: [www.blackbourne-u3a.org.uk](http://www.blackbourne-u3a.org.uk)

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