

This handbook is based on the 'Group Convenors/Leaders Handbook', issued by the Third Age Trust.

In Thanet u3a, Group Leaders run interest groups of all varieties and sizes. The Group Organiser assists with new group formation, helps members to join a group and deals with any difficulties.

See below for essential e-mail addresses.

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to organise an interest group. We are sure you will find it very rewarding, but it might seem a little daunting initially. This handbook is intended to provide advice and support with this.

Interest groups are central to u3a, and each group will develop its own structure. However, it is important that your group follows the u3a ethos of shared, participative, and self-help learning. The result will not only be an increase in knowledge, but also a supportive and friendly atmosphere which enables everyone to participate.

u3a principles

- **The Third Age Principle**

- Membership of a u3a is open to all those no longer in full-time employment.
- Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belong to a u3a.
- Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a u3a can do so.

- **The Self-Help Learning Principle**

- Members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire.
- Learning is by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards.
- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers. They are all u3a members.

- **The Mutual Aid Principle**

- Each u3a is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent, but a member of the Third Age Trust. This requires adherence to the u3a movement.
- No payments are made to members for services to any u3a.
- Each u3a is self-funded and membership subscriptions are kept as low as possible.
- Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the u3a.

How to Start a New Group

- You have a notion! Check with our website's Groups' page to see if anything like it is already operating.

- Think of a name.
- Generate interest by submitting the essential details of your idea to both the Groups' Organiser and to the comms@thanetu3a.org.uk team for inclusion in the regular News, Events and Reminders (NE&R) email.
- Ask other members at our coffee mornings and in the social time which precedes our bi-monthly talks if there is interest in your idea.
- The Groups' Organiser will contact you once there is a viable number for your group and will pass their names and contact details to you.
- Decide where you will meet, how often and on which day and at what time.
- The Groups' Organiser has a list of public venues. If you wish to meet in your own home or in that of another member of your group, you should carry out a risk assessment before your first meeting. Information on how to do this is given on our website on the page and the Groups' Organiser can help you with this. Risk assessments should also be carried out before any change of venue and before excursions. Some groups, e.g workshops, sports and walks, have special requirements for Risk Assessment, and a link for these is available in our website (thanet.u3asite.uk) New members should be informed of any potential issues at your venue. Public venues will have had their own risk assessments. Some Group Leaders use Zoom for online meetings. Again, the Groups' Organiser will help you with this.
- Most public venues will request payment. You will need to calculate the cost per member and decide how to collect the amounts. Once you have collected the amount due to the venue, contact our Treasurer (treasurer@thanetu3a.org.uk) whose responsibility it is to transfer the money to the venue and to record the transaction.
- Expenses might also be incurred for e.g. materials and you will need to consider how to recover any expenditure you incur from your members.
- Arrange a first meeting with your members and agree on your group leader. You might also find it useful to have a deputy leader.
- Once you have agreed all the details for your group, please let the Groups' Organiser know.
- You are ready to go.

Running Your Group

- At your first meeting you will want to explain the purpose of the group, Ask about the skills and knowledge which members might have and, if necessary, the level of your group – Beginners, Intermediate or Advanced.
- Agree some ground rules: punctuality, listening to one another, allowing others to speak, sending your apologies if you are unable to attend, agreeing to disagree amicably and treating every member of the group with respect. Everyone's contribution matters.
- Members should be asked to provide an up-to-date emergency contact – this should also be held on Beacon with their membership details.
- The size of your group depends on the activity and the venue. You may decide on an optimum number and having an automatic waiting list once your group is full.
- Group leaders should keep a register of members attending.
- Dissension within groups is rare. The Group Leader's role is to deal with any issue which arises between members and should strive to achieve harmony. Impartiality is important. Any issue may be discussed with the Groups' Organiser.

As a Group Leader you are entitled to ask members of your group to inform you in private of any health problem or if they take any medication of which you should be aware. This information must remain private.

Please consult the website's Documents tab to familiarise yourself with the important details of risk assessment, health and safety policies, safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion, accessibility, insurance, incident reporting and complaints. Compliance with these is required by the Charity Commission/Law. The Groups' Organiser will help guide you through the complexities of these.

Communication with members is usually by e-mail. Please use the bcc rather than the cc option unless you have the full agreement of all your members to share contact details. Some groups also use WhatsApp.

Data protection law demands that any records of members may be used only for the purposes of u3a and may not be divulged further. This also applies to communications between members.

Only Thanet u3a members may attend meetings, unless you arrange a one-time only taster session for a potential new member.

New members exploring our website are encouraged to seek information about any group which interests them by e-mailing the Group Leader. Please do reply to all e-mails and do keep the Groups' Organiser up-to-date.

When up and running, it can be good to share information about your interest group through our website, our Facebook group or in our local u3a newsletter.

You can update any changes of your group's activity on our website. If you need help with this, please contact our website manager, website@thanetu3a.org.uk. Technical support is also available by contacting itsupport@thanetu3a.org.uk.

You will have seen references to Beacon, the u3a's Administration system. You can use it to communicate with your group and the Groups' Organiser will help you with this.

Good luck!
Groups' Organiser

Groups' Organiser: groups@thanetu3a.org.uk
Website Manager: website@thanetu3a.org.uk
IT support: itsupport@thanetu3a.org.uk.
Comms Team: comms@thanetu3a.org.uk
Treasurer: treasurer@thanetu3a.org.uk