

INTEREST GROUP CONVENORS' GUIDELINES

What is a Convenor?

A Convenor is a member of Blackboume 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.

1. Who Can Join an Interest Group?

It is the policy of Blackboume U3A that anyone who wishes to join one of our Interest Groups MUST be a member of our U3A, even if he/she is a member of another U3A. The Third Age Trust has no national policy on this issue, and leaves it to each U3A Group to make its own decision about admitting members of other U3As to Interest Groups. Therefore, other U3As may have a different policy based on their own capacity for new members, waiting list, lecture hall capacity, etc.

2. 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?

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. Once our group is established what else do we need to think about?

- a) Attendance Register - U3A's National Office advises that, in order to cover your Groups' meetings under U3A insurance, an Attendance Register must be kept, even if your meetings are held in members' homes. If a claim were made after an event/meeting, it would be useful to know who was at the meeting for clarification. Members may say "I wouldn't do that" but they have families who might.

This also serves as a useful back-up record for any monies collected to copy to our own Treasurer as part of your end-of- year accounts submitted, as well as enabling you to see at a glance if a member of your Interest Group has not attended for some time. 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.

Checking of Blackbourne U3A membership – We would suggest that you check that your members have the current badge at your first meeting from September and check when new members join your group.

b) You should tell the Interest Groups' Coordinator

- when vacancies exist so that this can be advertised on the BU3A website and in the newsletter;
- when you have a waiting list so that the need for the formation of an additional group can be considered;
- when one of your members dies so that no insensitive contact is made with their family, or if a member moves out of the area (and wishes to leave BU3A) so that the Membership Secretary can be advised;
- of any changes in your group's name, format, meeting time or place;
- if the group should fail and cease to meet.

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

a) Groups with no transactions: 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.

b) Groups with a small number of transactions: For groups which take in only nominal amounts of cash (for example, to pay on a week by-week basis for refreshments, room hire, etc.), a simple cash book should be kept in which the amounts paid in and out can be noted. The cash in hand at 31 December will be carried forward to the following year. The amount of cash held should be kept as low as possible consistent with running the group efficiently. As a guide, £250 would be a maximum.

c) Groups handling larger sums: For groups handling larger sums a separate bank account may be established, and this account must be in the name of the Interest Group, e.g. "Blackbourne U3A Garden Visits Group". If a group decides that the number of its transactions suggest it should open a bank account, this must first be discussed with the treasurer who will advise after discussion with the committee.

Bank accounts should have at least 3 signatories of whom 2 are required for each cheque paid out - the two signatories must not be related, and neither signatory may be the same as the payee.

In accordance with instruction given to us, the following rules also apply:

1. The balance held should be kept as low as possible consistent with running the group efficiently. Any excess should be reduced.
2. When they are received, copies of bank statements should be forwarded to the U3A treasurer, annotated with brief details of transactions.

3. Arrangements should be made to add the U3A treasurer to the bank mandate and all cheques should be countersigned by the treasurer. Convenors will have to ensure that their bank mandates are revised as quickly as possible when the U3A treasurer ceases office.

The reason for these arrangements is that the Committee are responsible for all monies that are handled by anyone on behalf of U3A activities – year end only examination of convenors' records is not considered to be sufficient on its own.

d) Relating to all Groups:

1. It is accepted that personal credit cards may have to be used on occasions. The costs should be reimbursed using a group cheque.
2. The convenor will be responsible for keeping the accounting records of the group and presenting the annual accounts for the financial year ending 31st December. If your group is responsible for several outings, trips or events, income relating to each must be clearly matched with the relevant expenditure in the records.

For all advice and to answer any queries on handling monies, please do not hesitate to contact the Blackbourne U3A Treasurer, whose name & contact details are in your yearly programme and on the website.

8. Do we have to make any returns to the BU3A Treasurer?

At the end of the financial year, the Blackbourne U3A Treasurer will require all groups to give him a copy of their accounts before the full accounts can be passed by our examiner. This is not onerous, and our Treasurer is on hand for help and advice.

9. 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.

10. 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. Following Third Age Trust guidance non-members may attend up to three lecture meetings and three interest group meetings per year. 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.

11. Outings

a) 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. If this is not complied with, 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.

b) I organise outings for my U3A. Is it acceptable for me to fill the empty seats on the coach with non-members to defray costs?

On an occasional basis and with prior committee approval, there is no problem. It is not acceptable, however, for the same non-member to attend U3A events regularly, with the exception of a carer accompanying a member. Should a non-member be allowed to attend U3A activities on a regular basis, the U3A might find itself without liability cover, should that non-member be involved in an incident. This is a flexible policy but it must not be abused. It is advised that a list of all travellers be left with a member of the committee who is not travelling, so that in the case of an accident, someone holds a comprehensive list. All members and guests should carry ID with them (e.g. medical card, which can be bought from National Office).

12. 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. 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.

13. 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.

- Projector - whenever you use the projector, the committee requests that you please acknowledge this by completing the appropriate sections in the Record Book provided (in the store cupboard). **If any of the equipment develops a fault or is accidentally damaged**, please advise **a.s.a.p.** either of the two members below, so that this can be rectified for the next user. Thank you.

Nick Chamberlin - 01359-242601 nick@chamberlin1100.freeserve.co.uk

14. Do you want news of our activities?

Yes, we most certainly do, even if your Interest Group has a waiting list, you are strongly encouraged to submit regular reports of your past and future activities (with photographs if possible) to both the newsletter and website. The newsletter may be restricted to the amount written and number of photos which could be included (check this with the Editor), but there are no such restrictions for your webpage. Newsletter deadlines are detailed on the back page of each issue - e-mail your newsletter submissions to publisher@blackbourne-u3a.org.uk, but the webpage can be up-dated at any time and almost immediately - e-mail your website submissions to webmaster@blackbourne-u3a.org.uk.

15. Does Blackbourne U3A have a Refund Policy?

Yes, as follows:

- a) It is for the Convenor of each Interest Group to decide on a refund policy which best suits the needs of his/her own group.
- b) Generally, once a ticket/place has been booked and paid for by a BU3A member for an outing or event, that member is responsible for the re-sale of that ticket/place if he/she can no longer attend for any reason. The re-sale of this unwanted ticket/place should ideally be to another BU3A member but could, with the agreement of the Convenor, be sold to a non-member.

- c) If possible, the Convenor will try to help 'off-load' this unwanted ticket/place, and particularly if there is a Waiting List for the outing/event, but it is not for the Interest Group nor Blackbourne U3A to refund these pre-paid monies as a matter of course.
- d) If the Interest Group's funds allow, it is entirely at the Convenor's discretion as to whether the reason for the unwanted ticket warrants a refund.

16. 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

U3A (UK) website: www.u3a.org.uk