

Aston Clinton u3a

Charity Number 1115424

Guidance for Group Conveners



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The guidelines shown below have been drafted by the committee of Aston Clinton u3a to assist with the smooth running of all groups operating under its auspices. It is hoped that they will assist those who may be considering starting a group for a particular field of interest and also our current Group Conveners in the day to day running of their groups.

They have been drafted to ensure that we meet the National Guidelines set by the Third Age Trust, who provide our liability insurance, and the Financial and Legal obligations placed upon us by the Charity Commission and The Department for Revenue and Customs.

Before any group wishes to start up under the umbrella of ACu3a the Groups Coordinator must be consulted and the committee must be informed of what is proposed and their approval obtained.

The u3a operates a self-help learning principle – by the members for the members. The use of paid tutors is not encouraged. If a group has the need for a paid tutor the Groups Coordinator should be consulted in advance.

Points to consider when starting a group:

- 1. Membership:** Should be restricted to members of ACu3a and members of other u3as. Members of other u3as should only be allowed to attend if there are places available and members of ACu3a are not disadvantaged by their attendance. Membership of another u3a must be checked. Allowing non-members to attend may well invalidate our liability insurance. If you need to check whether an individual is a member, please contact the Membership Secretary, who holds a master list.
- 2. Time:** Length of meetings, time of day, frequency. Consider how much time/expertise you will realistically be able to give and what you expect from other group members. Endeavour, as far as it is possible, to avoid meeting at the same time and day as other groups. A quick check with the Diary on the web-site will help avoid problems.
- 3. Venue:** This will need to take account of the size of the group and what facilities the group may need - tables, chairs, equipment etc. When hiring a hall or other venue, consider whether the cost is realistic for the size of the group.
- 4. Size of Group:** This will be dependent on the subject matter, method of delivery and the equipment and accommodation available. The ethos of the u3a is that it seeks to meet the needs of the membership and waiting lists should, wherever possible, be avoided. It may be necessary to run more than one group.

5. **First Meeting:** The first meeting of a group is crucial in developing shared learning and it is essential that you are well prepared. You will need to agree your purpose, the skills and resources available and the methods proposed for the learning to take place. In general terms this means:
- the area of content (what the group is going to do)
 - the level at which the group will work (beginners, improvers, advanced)
 - the process (practical, theoretical) and
 - the method of delivery, discussion, instruction, presentation etc. This may vary from meeting to meeting.
6. **Insurance:** Group meetings are covered by the insurance provided by the Third Age Trust. However, as with most insurance policies, it does have its limitations and if you are in any doubt as to whether a particular activity will be covered check with the Secretary before proceeding.

Sustaining a Group:

Interest groups are self-motivating and often very flexible. They come into being, continue and cease as directed by the members. Whilst this is their greatest advantage it can also be a great disadvantage. Groups that are too flexible are unlikely to be robust and unless well-nourished have the potential to fail. The following may help:

- **Need for record keeping** – It is essential that you keep a record of those who attend meetings together with a note of any visitors and those who may be on a waiting list to join the group.
- **Forthcoming events** – To ensure all members of our u3a are aware of what is available to them, details of future activities and meetings should be entered as events on the website. All conveners will be given access to the website to edit their group page and add events. Assistance and support to do this can be provided by the website manager who can be emailed via the 'contacts' page on the website.
- **Using email** - Many Group Conveners inform their members of forthcoming events by email. With the introduction of the Beacon Membership system, emailing can be securely done via this system. Training will be provided for those wishing to use this system. If you wish to email your group members from your own email address then please ensure that you use “Blind Copy” (Bcc) when emailing a number of people so that the privacy of individual members is respected.
- **Build variety into the programme** - Whilst there is some comfort in a group that meets at the same time, in the same place and does the same thing it may well become stale. This can be overcome by building variety into the programme by varying the form, the delivery method and the venue. Should you wish to arrange an outing or visit on a different day from your usual meeting day, please check with the Events Coordinator to ensure that you avoid a clash with other groups or events.

- **Consider the occasional open meeting** - Some groups bond too successfully and rebuff new members. Often this is done unwittingly and is not healthy in the long term. If relevant, have the occasional open meeting where non-members can come to see what you do. This may lead to new members.
- **Consider a shared learning project** – This can refocus a group and give it new purpose.
- **If the group is losing members** – Try to find out why. This is best done by speaking to those who have left and also those who remain. There may be a specific problem that the group can address.
- **Unhelpful behaviour by group member** – Should this be the case, it is essential that action be taken. There are strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour and you might benefit from sharing your thoughts with the Groups Coordinator, other Group Conveners or members of the committee.
- **Lacklustre groups** – May well respond to a treat, a special speaker or outing. If this is opened to the whole u3a the group may also gain new members.
- **Unrealistic expectations** – It is possible for a Group Convener or group members to have an unrealistic expectation of what can be achieved. You may have an ideal, but it is unlikely that every member of the group will reach this. If everyone feels comfortable enough to contribute (or not to contribute) then it is probably a good learning environment and expectation may well be achieved over time.
- **The group has run its course** – It may be that a group has run its course in its current form. In such circumstances the best action may be to close it, wait a while and then consider re-launching it.
- **How to deal with emergencies** – This has to be left to the best endeavours of those who are present. In the event of an injury being sustained by a member of the group an **Incident Report Form** must be completed by the Group Convener and forwarded to the Secretary without delay. Group Conveners must have a copy of the form at every meeting. A copy of the Incident Report Form is attached at Appendix 1 and is also available on the website.
- **Where to find help** – A problem is a group problem not just that of the Convener. Consider the group itself as the first port of call. Often you will find the solution there. The Groups Coordinator may also be able to help.

Finance Guidelines

The following general rule applies to all groups operating within ACu3a.

All individual groups should be self-funding and at the end of the financial year there should not be a negative or excessive balance. Each Group Convener must charge the members a fee to recover all expenses such as: hall costs, speaker expenses, telephone calls, postage charges, printing etc. Group Conveners should ensure that only reasonable amounts of money are held in their accounts in the long term.

The following rules must be observed so that the treasurer can prepare accurate accounts each month.

1. It is a requirement of the Charities Commission that Income and Expenditure must be shown separately. All Group Conveners who handle money must keep a record which the treasurer may require to see at any time. Payments may be made to the treasurer by either cheque or bank transfer and may be paid nett. Cheques must be made payable to ASTON CLINTON u3a with group details on the back. If a bank transfer is used then a confirming email with details should be sent to the treasurer.
2. Group Conveners who handle small amounts of money (e.g. just for refreshments) need not involve the treasurer but full records must be kept as described above.
3. If a tutor is paid a fee to lead the group on a regular basis, the tutor must state in writing that he/she will be responsible for paying any income tax and national insurance contributions that may arise from the income involved. All paid tutors should fill in a Professional Speakers Expense Request Form (available from the treasurer).
4. Group Conveners should make bookings for the halls used. Invoices must be submitted to the treasurer direct. Therefore, Group Conveners must keep the treasurer informed of all bookings and any cancellations. It is good practice to confirm verbal bookings in writing or by email, with a copy to the treasurer.
5. If members are paying for more than one event by cheque then full details of each event should be included on the back. If members pay by bank transfer, then a separate payment should be made for each event. The name of the event should be entered in the bank reference field (if available).
6. Please give plenty of notice to the treasurer when requesting cheques or bank transfers for paying event expenses.
7. If you have a query on any financial matter, you should contact the treasurer who will be pleased to assist.

Appendix 1

INCIDENT REPORT FORM – ACu3a

Name of Injured party/address/telephone number :

Name/address/telephone number of others involved:

Date/Time of Incident :

Location :

Nature of Incident/Circumstances :

Injury Details/Property Damage

Name and address of person causing injury/damage :-

Witnessed by :
Address :

Telephone number :

Action Taken :

Was any specialised assistance required at the scene? If so give details.

Was medical advice sought afterwards? If so give details.

Name of Group Convener

Telephone number.....

Signed
(injured party)

Signed
(Group Convener)

Date