

Background to u3a Movement and Key Principles

Origin: The u3a movement originated in France. It was established in 1973 by the Faculty of Social Sciences at Toulouse as an external adjunct to the university sector.

Expansion: In 1990, the concept was extended to provide access to education for the third age across all French universities. The movement subsequently developed across Europe and is now established internationally.

UK Model: The UK introduced u3a in 1980 but modified the concept significantly. It took the view that most retired people had knowledge and skills that could be shared with others for their education and pleasure. Most English-speaking countries follow a similar model. By 2020, the UK movement had grown to 1,000 branches with 450,000 members.

Bolton u3a: Formed in 1991, it started with a handful of members and 2 interest groups. Membership has grown to over 360 members running over 37 interest groups. Like all local u3as, Bolton is a member organisation of the Third Age Trust (TAT), the national support and advisory body.

Operational Independence: All u3as in the UK are "operationally independent" self-help organisations run by the voluntary efforts of their members. Interest Groups are run by members, with assistance available from the TAT and/or local members. Members who create and run these groups are given every encouragement and assistance.

Group Membership & Attendance Rules

Membership Requirement: Group Leaders and regular attendees of the groups should be current u3a members.

Taster Sessions: Attendees who are not current members are allowed either:

- 1 "taster" session at a maximum of 2 groups, OR
- A maximum of 2 "taster" sessions at 1 group.

Fees: Taster attendees must pay the usual attendance fee. To continue attending after these sessions, they must pay their annual membership (or a pro rata rate as detailed elsewhere).

Starting a New Interest Group

Initial Steps & Approvals

Contact: Before starting a new group, a potential leader should contact the local Group Leaders Co-ordinator (GLC). They must explain the subject/theme of the group and what will be required regarding venue and equipment.

Committee Approval: Once the initial proposal is discussed with the GLC, it goes before the committee for approval. Any future changes must also be approved by the committee in advance.

Expertise: You do not have to be an expert in the subject to start a group. Other interested members can join to explore a particular subject together.

Viability: To be viable, a group should try to maintain an average attendance of at least 6 members.

Scheduling & Frequency

Logistics: The frequency of meetings (usually once or twice per month, depending on the topic) must be discussed with the GLC, along with the anticipated start date and duration.

Duration: Courses can be "open-ended" or for a specific period (e.g., 6–10 weekly or monthly sessions).

Pop-up Groups: If a group is only intended to run for a short period (e.g., 6 sessions) on a "pop-up" basis, it is feasible to meet weekly.

Holiday Breaks: Group sessions commonly break for holidays in July and August, as well as in December for Christmas, though this depends entirely on the individual leader and group members.

Publicity and Communication

Promotion: Once agreed, the date and time of the new group will be advertised in the monthly Newsletter until the group ceases to operate. This allows interested

members to contact the leader directly. Announcements are also made at the general monthly meeting and detailed on the website.

Leader Responsibilities: It is the Group Leader's responsibility to send details of the first meeting, and any changes to its format, to the Newsletter Editor.

Deadlines: Submission entries must be sent to the Editor no later than the **3rd Wednesday of the month.**

Automation: Unless details change, the Editor will automatically include the group entry in future Newsletters without needing further contact. Leaders can also supply the Newsletter Editor with a full schedule of meetings/topics to avoid making a monthly report.

Use Beacon to keep tabs on your group

Beacon is the u3a secure online database.

It is important to use Beacon so that you know you are complying with data protection.

You will also find it very simple to contact all your group members via Beacon.

Training in using Beacon will be offered. You are welcome to ask Beacon Admin Maggy for help (u3abolton@gmail.com)

Beacon also allows you to add as many 'helpers' as you want, which means you can delegate tasks like emailing members or printing attendance sheets.