

## Background to u3a movement and key principles

You may be aware that 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. 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. The UK introduced u3a in 1980 but modified the concept significantly, taking 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 one thousand branches with 450,000 members.

Bolton u3a was formed in 1991. It started with a handful of members and 2 interest groups. We now have a membership of over three hundred and run over 30 interest groups.

Like all local u3a's, Bolton is a member organisation of the Third Age Trust (TAT), the national support and advisory body.

All u3a's in the UK are 'operationally independent' - self-help organisations run by the voluntary efforts of their members and one of the most important aspects of such voluntary work is the role of Interest Groups, which are run by members but there is always help and assistance available from the TAT and/or local members.

Members who create and run such Interest Groups are much appreciated and will be given every encouragement and assistance in the formation and the running of the Group.

Group Leaders and regular attendees of the groups should be current u3a members. Attendees who may not be current u3a members, are allowed either 1 "taster" session at a maximum of 2 groups, or a maximum of 2 "taster" sessions at 1 group (at which they must pay the usual attendance fee) but must pay their annual membership (or pro rata at the current rate as detailed elsewhere) if they wish to continue attendances at the Group.

Before starting a new group, a potential leader should contact the local Group Leaders

Co-ordinator (GLC) - see Contact List at end of this Handbook - explaining what the subject/ theme of the group will be and what will be required by way of venue and equipment.

Once the initial proposal has been discussed with the GLC, it will go before the committee for approval and any future changes will also have to be approved by the committee in advance.

It should be stressed that, if you have an idea for a new group, you don't have to be an expert in the subject - there may be other members interested but not necessarily experts either, but who are interested in exploring a particular subject. It is recommended that, for a group to be viable, it should try and maintain an average attendance of at least 6 members.

The frequency of meetings (which is usually once or twice per month, dependent on the topic) should be discussed with the GLC as should the anticipated start date and intended duration of the course, which may be "open-ended" or for a specific period (say 6-10 weekly or monthly sessions - there are no hard and fast rules).

If the group is only intending to run for a short period, say 6 sessions, on a "pop-up" basis, then it would be feasible for it to meet weekly for its duration. It is not unusual for group sessions to break in July and August for holidays, and also in December, over the Christmas period, but not necessarily - it all depends on the individual leader and Group members.

Once agreed, the date/time of the new group will always be advertised in our monthly Newsletter until such time as the group ceases to operate so that once the group is up and running, you will be contacted direct by interested members.

An announcement about a new group's formation will also be made at the general monthly meeting, to give it as wide publicity as possible, and it will also be detailed on the website. However, it is the Group Leader's responsibility to send details of the first meeting, and any changes to its format, to the Newsletter Editor -see contact list - for entry in the next issue.

Please be aware of the deadline for entries which is no later than the 3rd Wednesday of the month.

Unless any details in your entry change, the Editor will automatically include your entry in future Newsletters without need for further contact. You could even supply the Newsletter Editor with a schedule of the Group's meetings/topics, to avoid a monthly report.