

Bristol u3a – Notes for Group Leaders

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What makes a successful u3a Group?

You do not have to be an expert in the chosen subject to lead a group. Bristol u3a believes that learning is for sharing. Finding things out or discussing together is an excellent way to learn. Enthusiasm for the subject, and a willingness to encourage others to join you in exploring it, are all that is required. Some of the best groups are those where no one person is “the teacher” but where everyone takes a turn at researching and presenting a topic, and thus the group learns together.

All our groups are run by our members, for our members. The philosophy of the u3a is that we are all teachers, and all learners, and that we work together to learn together. We never pay people to lead or teach our groups.

You don't have to do everything yourself. Involve your group members in running the group. This might involve taking turns to host group meetings in different members' homes, organising refreshments, taking turns to research and present a topic, organising a visit to a museum or taking responsibility for dealing with any money the group needs to handle, e.g. towards the cost of hiring a room (if the central subsidy is insufficient).

The main task of the Group Leader is therefore to establish and maintain the group, to organise the group's schedule of meetings (but not necessarily to provide the venue), to be a source of information for potential members, and a contact point for information to and from Bristol u3a as a wider organisation. It's also useful to maintain a register of attendees – especially for popular groups where there is a waiting list.

How to start a new group in Bristol u3a

Your Groups Co-ordinator is there to help with any aspect of running your group including starting it up. They can advise on all aspects of your proposal, including things like room hire if required. You should share your plans with them before the group is advertised on our website, social media and in Newsletters. Groups Co-ordinators may know of people who are already on a waiting list for a new group in your chosen subject area.

Names and contacts for all the Groups Co-ordinators are at the end of this document.

Setting up a new group is very straight-forward:

1. Choose your topic:

Start by writing a short description of what the group will do. This can be very general (e.g. Book Group: reading and discussing selected fiction) or more specific (e.g. Introduction to Economics: a programme of ten sessions covering topics *x, y and z*, and using reference book *ABC*).

2. Choose your time:

Groups normally meet on a regular day for about 2 hours. Some groups meet monthly, others fortnightly and some meet weekly. Most groups meet in the daytime on weekdays but there is no reason why you cannot choose to run your group in the evening or at weekends e.g. a group that likes to watch live music.

3. Choose your place:

Pre-pandemic, most groups met in someone's home. This could be the leader's home, another group member's home, or meeting in each other's homes in turn. During the pandemic many groups turned to Zoom.

These days a lot of groups are choosing to meet in public venues: there is more space, the venue is more accessible for members (better parking, close to public transport and can cater for members with disabilities) and members may no longer be comfortable hosting (or attending) groups in private homes. Other groups are continuing with online meetings.

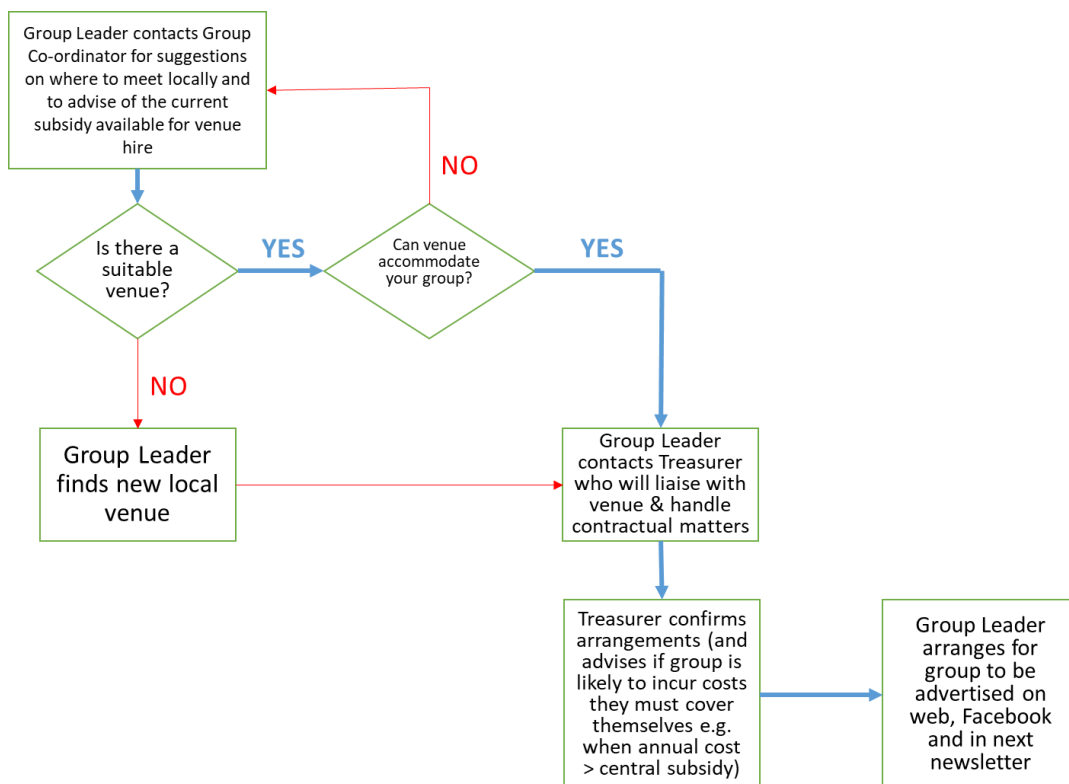
Online, home or venue – it's up to you.

If you choose to meet online, note that Bristol u3a has a Google Workspace licence which includes a facility for online meetings using the Google Meet platform completely free of charge. Like Zoom, this includes facilities such as screen-sharing and breakout rooms. Your meeting can include up to 100 participants and there is no time limit for meetings. Contact the IT Officer for more information.

If you want to meet in a public venue, finding and funding a suitable location can be daunting but Bristol u3a is pleased to help. We maintain a list of rooms we know are available at reasonable cost and will help meet the cost of room hire with a subsidy up to £400 per year. **If your chosen room is going to cost more than this (perhaps because you have fortnightly meetings) then the group must contribute to meet the excess cost.** You need to agree arrangements both with your group members and with the Treasurer.

You must not enter into an agreement to hire a room without *first* consulting your Groups Co-ordinator and *then* the treasurer who must agree to the invoicing and payment arrangements in advance.

Here is the process that **must be followed** if you plan to meet in a public venue:



4. Exceptional start-up costs

Sometimes a group needs to acquire a specialist resource as a one-off, just to get started. Bristol u3a is able to provide financial assistance with a grant of up to £50 in appropriately merited cases. This is in addition to any funding allocated in support of venue hire.

To apply, you must work with your Groups Co-ordinator to build a financial case that clearly demonstrates that the resources or equipment cannot reasonably be provided by members or another source. The Groups Co-ordinator will bring the case to the Membership and Groups Team who will make a decision in conjunction with the Treasurer.

All resources or equipment acquired in this manner will remain the property of Bristol u3a and documented in the Asset Register.

Note: Text books are normally not considered a qualifying expense.

Once your plans have been agreed:

1. Read the [Guidance for Group Leaders](#) which is on the Members' Info page of the website and has important information which Group Leaders need to know about, including group expenses, data protection, insurance, and equality and diversity policies.
2. Let members know about it:
 - Send your agreed proposal to **the website editor**, Gillian Skinner web@bristolu3a.org.uk. You will need to provide the following information (ask your Groups Co-ordinator for a form). Note that it's also important you resend the form if you've made any changes since launching the group (e.g. change of leader/venue/time etc.)

I need the following information for any new group so that I can create a page for it on the website. This is only for groups that have started or about to start – not just "proposed".
Please indicate area: North West North East South
Name of group (maximum 30 characters including spaces)
When does the group meet?
Where does it meet? Full address if it is a public building. If member's home, just the area.
Venue access (details such as parking, public transport, level access)
A BRIEF summary (a sentence or two) about your group
Fuller description of the group's activities
Name and email address of group convenor
Thank you Gillian Skinner, Website Editor web@bristolu3a.org.uk

- Send the same information to the **ePost editors**, publicity@bristolu3a.org.uk
 - *ePost is published towards the end of each month*
- Send the same information to the **newsletter editor**, Joan Gubbin newsletter@bristolu3a.org.uk
 - *The newsletter is published quarterly. Joan will include it in the next edition.*

- Send the same information for inclusion on **social media** to the Cheryl Loy-Hancocks south@bristolu3a.org.uk
- Send your plans to the **Beacon administrator**, Judy Parker judyeparker@hotmail.com who will add it to our database and help you to use Beacon to keep track of your members.

Running your group

Communicate with and keep track of your Group members.

You MUST use the Beacon database to keep track of who is in your group, and ideally, to communicate with them via secure email. It is also where members' emergency contact details may be found.

Contact Judy Parker judyeparker@hotmail.com if you do not currently have a logon to Beacon. It's a good idea for this responsibility to be shared between two people so both will need access.

Whenever you are communicating outside of Beacon, you must ensure that you and your group members work within our Data Protection rules about sharing email addresses, etc. You can find out more about Bristol u3a's data Protection policy on the Member's Info page of our website – just follow the link inside the section for “Group Conveners” or [click here](#).

Running group meetings

The pandemic has meant that we've had to consider many more things when running a group. Primarily, this is about Health and Safety, but it's also about imagining what might happen and then using that information to set members' expectations.

We have prepared a Risk Assessment template to help you with this and it is particularly helpful when restarting your group after a pause or changing venue. You can find the template inside the Bristol u3a Documents and Policies link in the Members Info section of our website or [click here](#). It's a good idea for the whole group to be involved in thinking about risk and helping you to complete the template.

It is also good practice to maintain a register of who attends your group meetings. This is particularly helpful if you are running a popular group. If you find that a member has not attended successive meetings, you are then able to have a conversation about releasing their place in the group so that someone on the waiting list may join. *Warning! Do not simply remove someone from your email distribution list without having a conversation first.*

Recording expenditures that require money to be collected from the members of the group.

If the proposed expenditure exceeds the cap of £400 money will need to be collected from members of the group and recorded on Beacon. This can be done through your group entry on beacon using the ledger option. “Ins” record money collected from members and “Outs” record money paid to the Treasurer.

If any money is collected from members it should be recorded on Beacon as above so that a record is clearly visible of all financial transactions taking place.

Dealing with enquiries

Prospective members will be able to contact you directly by email (from the website) or by phone (if you have included your phone number in the Annual Bulletin) to ask if they may join the group.

Please reply promptly to all such enquiries and be as helpful as possible. If there is room for more people in your group, then invite the prospective member to come to the next available meeting. *See notes below about enquiries from non-members.*

What to do if your group is full

If you receive an enquiry and your group is full please explain this to the enquirer, making a note of their details, and adding their name to your waiting list (preferably on the Beacon database). **Please also email your groups coordinator** to tell them of names added to your waiting list. They will try to get new groups going.

u3a Members and Non-members

All u3a groups are covered by our Public Liability insurance which assumes that all group members are u3a members. It's therefore important that you check that all members of your group are u3a members. You can do this by asking to see their membership cards or by logging on to the Beacon database. People sometimes forget to renew, and a simple check in each group can help nudge those who haven't paid their subscriptions while ensuring that everybody is covered by our Public Liability insurance.

Our website allows non-members to make enquiries about groups so sometimes a **non-member** will ask to join a meeting as a "taster" before signing up to u3a membership. This is allowed at the discretion of the Group Leader. However, you are encouraged to collect their full contact details (name, address, phone number) for insurance purposes. If you are hosting the meeting in your own home, you are advised to think carefully before welcoming somebody who is not known to you or another member of the group.

Ongoing publicity about your group

You may publicise your group at any time on the web, social media (e.g. the [Bristol u3a Members Facebook group](#)) and in the quarterly newsletter. This is an excellent way to advertise for new members or simply to share some interesting news. Don't worry if your group is full because news and photos demonstrate the ongoing vibrancy of Bristol u3a and may inspire other members to start a new group of their own.

Please take care to ensure that your group information is completely up to date by telling your Groups Co-ordinator of any changes and making sure that your page on the website is kept up to date. You will be asked to confirm the group's details each June ready for the next Annual Bulletin.

Note: Please ensure that you obtain group members' consent before using any photos in the above.

Useful contacts

Five Groups Co-ordinators cover the whole of the Bristol area. Their job is to offer help to new groups, or to groups where there are difficulties, eg over finding a room, managing a waiting list, etc. They can be contacted as follows:

All Language groups: wherever they are located

Hilda Ball 07837 084772 languages@bristolu3a.org.uk

East and North East Bristol groups: Fishponds, Kingswood, St George, Downend, Easton, Frenchay, Emersons Green, Mangotsfield, Warmley, Longwell Green, Hanham etc.

Lindsay Gough & Liz Goodenough negroups@bristolu3a.org.uk

West and North West Bristol Groups – Clifton, Redland, Westbury, Henleaze, Stoke Bishop, Cotham, Bishopston, Horfield, Lockleaze, Filton, Bradley Stoke etc.

Richard Johnson richard.johnson433@googlemail.com

South Bristol Groups - all areas south of the river, Bedminster, Brislington, Knowle, Whitchurch, Stockwood, etc

Cheryl Loy-Hancocks south@bristolu3a.org.uk

Other important contacts

Treasurer: treasurer@bristolu3a.org.uk

Website: Gillian Skinner web@bristolu3a.org.uk

Beacon: Bob Slader bristolu3a.bob@gmail.com and Judy Parker judyeparker@hotmail.com

ePost: Linda Soutter publicity@bristolu3a.org.uk

Newsletter: Joan Gubbin newsletter@bristolu3a.org.uk

IT Officer: Martin Stubbs u3ait@bristolu3a.org.uk