Bristol u3a – Guidance on Starting a New Group

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Once your group is established, you are advised to also read "Group Leaders' Guidance on running a group" which can be found on the Group Leaders' page on the Bristol u3a website. You'll find clear information inside that document explaining what is necessary (required by all groups) and what is recommended good practice.

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.

However, it's not compulsory for groups to have a focus on learning – some are just for fun. Good examples of this include the Singing groups and the Daytime Disco groups.

All of our groups are run by our members, for our members. The philosophy of u3a is that all pull together. We never pay people to lead or teach our groups.

A Group Leader does not have to do everything themselves. Involve your group members in running the group. This might involve taking turns to host group meeting, 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). Equally, a meeting does not have to be cancelled just because the "official Group Leader" is away – usually another group member can step in.

The main task of the Group Leader is therefore to establish and maintain the group, to organise the group's schedule of meetings, to be a source of information for potential members, and a contact point for information to and from Bristol u3a as a wider organisation. These are all responsibilities that are best shared.

It's important to maintain a **register of attendees** for group meetings. This does not need to be shared with anyone else, but you will find it very useful as your group becomes more popular and you need to think about starting a waiting list. The register will help you identify those group members who do not come regularly, giving you the opportunity to respectfully ask them to give up their place in the group so that others may join. Having an attendance register is critical in case of an insurance claim.

How to start a new group in Bristol u3a

Your Area 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. Area 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 Area Co-ordinators are at the end of this document.

Setting up a new group is very straight-forward:

1. **Choose your topic:**

    a. A group can focus on any subject you like – the only restriction is that it **must not** give the impression that it endorses a single faith, political party or an alternative/complementary medical practice.

    b. Start by writing a short description of what the group will do and in which area of Greater Bristol the group will be based. The description can be as general or as specific as you like – the idea is to convey enough information to attract others. Your local Area Co-ordinator can help with this.

2. **Advertise your idea to other members**

    a. Send what you have written above to Linda Soutter (publicity@bristolu3a.org.uk) for inclusion in the next ePost. If you happen to live in an area with its own local newsletter (e.g. E&NE Bristol), send the same email to the local newsletter editor.

3. **Meet with everyone who has replied to your advertisement to agree logistics**

    Once you've had enough replies for you to consider the group viable, contact everybody and arrange an informal meet-up in a local café or similar. The objective of the meeting is to reach a consensus on all the necessary logistics associated with the group, specifically:

    - **Subject matter and group dynamics? e.g.**
        - If it's a discussion group, how will you choose your topics? Is anything off-limits?
        - If it's a walking group, who will decide the route? Are there any agreed limitations e.g. time of day, distance, terrain etc.
        - If it's a dancing group, who will choose the music? Are there any preferred genres or decades?
    - **Preferred location for meetings? Time & Duration of meetings? Frequency?**

- u3a strongly recommends that all group meetings should take place online or in a public venue (subsidy available to cover costs). While many u3a meetings have historically been held in private homes, this is now actively discouraged for several reasons:
    i. Accessibility – Locations for new groups must have flat access, have accessible toilets and be close to public transport routes
    ii. Groups should not to be unreasonably constrained for space so as to limit group size. e.g. Although a discussion group might get started with just 5 members, accommodation should allow for around 12-14 members
    iii. Many potential frictions between group members are removed - we are generally more understanding of others' foibles and habits in a public space than we might be in our own home.
    iv. Personal safety and safeguarding.
- **How will group admin responsibilities be shared?**
    - Who will keep the group membership listing up to date on Beacon?
    - Who will answer email enquiries from potential new group members?
    - Who will send reminders ahead of group meetings

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.

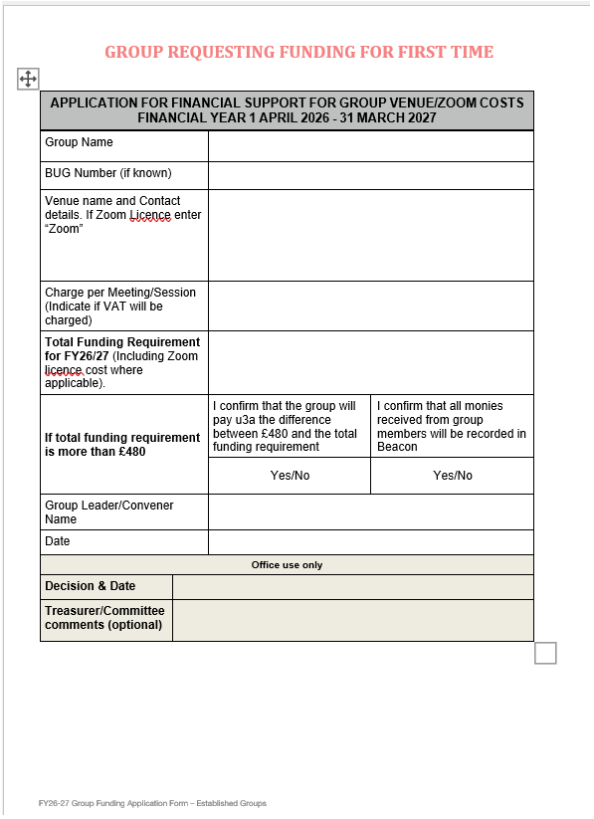
If you want to meet in a public venue, finding and funding a suitable location can be daunting but Bristol u3a is pleased to help. We maintain a list of rooms we know are available at reasonable cost and will help meet the cost of room hire with a subsidy up to £480 per year.

- Once you've found a suitable venue that's available to hire, **tell them that you need to await approval before making a concrete booking**.

- Collect the following information:
    - Venue name and postal address
    - Contact details for the venue's administrator (the person who will issue the invoices):
        - Name
        - Email address
        - Telephone number
    - Room hire details:
        - Room name

- Hourly rate
- Will VAT be charged on top of the hourly rate quoted?
- Agreed cost for each meeting (the amount that we'll expect to see on ever invoice)

- Complete the form for groups requesting funding for the first time which can be found in the Group Leaders' section of the Bristol u3a website and send it to your **Area Co-ordinator for approval.** You'll also be allocated a unique "BUG number" which stands for Bristol u3a Group number.



GROUP REQUESTING FUNDING FOR FIRST TIME

APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR GROUP VENUE/ZOOM COSTS FINANCIAL YEAR 1 APRIL 2026 - 31 MARCH 2027		
Group Name		
BUG Number (if known)		
Venue name and Contact details. If Zoom Licence enter "Zoom"		
Charge per Meeting/Session (Indicate if VAT will be charged)		
Total Funding Requirement for FY26/27 (Including Zoom licence cost where applicable).		
If total funding requirement is more than £480	I confirm that the group will pay u3a the difference between £480 and the total funding requirement	I confirm that all monies received from group members will be recorded in Beacon
	Yes/No	Yes/No
Group Leader/Convener Name		
Date		
Office use only		
Decision & Date		
Treasurer/Committee comments (optional)		

FY26-27 Group Funding Application Form – Established Groups

- Once you've received approval (this should be within few days), you may contact the venue to confirm your booking. **Please impress upon them that the invoice must include the following information: "u3a <your group name> BUG <number>"** and be sent to treasurer@bristolu3a.org.uk. Any invoice that does not include those specific details may be rejected (or will be significantly delayed). If more than one group meets at the same location and the venue intends to send one aggregate invoice, each group must be represented as a separate line item in the format "u3a <group name> BUG <number>".

- The final piece of administration is to complete a Risk Assessment form for your group. This is required by our insurance company and is vital to ensure that group members are protected in case of a claim. Recognising that for example, physical activity groups expose themselves to different sorts of risks to discussion groups, there's a choice of different forms. Risk Assessment forms are available from Linda Soutter (linda.soutter@btinternet.com) and are tailored to each different kind of group e.g. the questions related for Discussion Groups are different to those related to Physical

Activity groups.
Completing the form is straight-forward. However, you're advised to also add comments to demonstrate that you have actively considered each question, rather than simply treating the form as a tick list. Once again, your Area Co-ordinator will be able to help.

- Enjoy your group!

If your chosen room is going to cost more than £480 (perhaps because you have fortnightly meetings) then the group must contribute to meet the excess cost. As Group Leader, you will be responsible for collecting the money and then updating the ledger option on your group's record on Beacon. This is much easier than it sounds: "Ins" record money collected from members and "Outs" record money paid to the Treasurer. Detailed guidance is available on the Group Leaders' page of the Bristol u3a website in the document entitled "Using the Beacon Group Ledger". Your Area Co-ordinator will also be able to help and advise.

Bottom line: You must not enter into an agreement to hire a room without consulting your Area Co-ordinator.

1. 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 **£100** in appropriately merited cases. This is in addition to any funding allocated in support of venue hire.

To apply, you must work with your Area 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 Area 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, such as 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 Area Co-ordinator for a form). Don't forget that to resend the form if you make any changes since launching the group (e.g. change of leader/venue/time etc.)

Name of group
When does the group meet? Day/frequency/time
Where does it meet? ***Full address NOT required if venue is already listed on the website or if meeting in a member's home.***
Venue access (parking, public transport, level access/steps, T-loop, disabled toilet) ***NB this is only needed if the venue is NOT already listed on the website. If it is a private home please supply accessibility details etc and the area the private home is in eg Bishopston.***
FULL description of the group's activities including cost to members if applicable
Name and email address of group convenor/leader who will receive messages through the website. ***More than one leader can be listed, in which case please indicate whether or not they should be contactable via the message form.***

3. Send the same information to the **ePost editor,** publicity@bristolu3a.org.uk
   ePost is published towards the end of each month

4. 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.

5. Contact the Beacon administrator (Judy Parker beaconaccess@bristolu3a.org.uk) and request access to Beacon. Please also ask them to set up a record for your group if this has not already been done by your local Area Co-ordinator.

Useful contacts

Area Co-ordinators

Three Area 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:

- **East and North East Bristol groups**: Fishponds, Kingswood, St George, Downend, Easton, Frenchay, Emersons Green, Mangotsfield, Warmley, Longwell Green, Hanham etc.
    - Lindsay Gough & Lyn Hancock negroups@bristolu3a.org.uk

- **West and North West Bristol Groups** – Clifton, Redland, Westbury, Henleaze, Stoke Bishop, Cotham, Bishopston, Horfield, Lockleaze, Filton, Bradley Stoke etc.
    - Rebecca Nelson & Martyn Goss nwgroups@bristolu3a.org.uk

- **South Bristol Groups** - all areas south of the river, Bedminster, Brislington, Knowle, Whitchurch, Stockwood, etc
    - Heather Anne south@bristolu3a.org.uk

Other important contacts

- Languages Specialist Adviser: Hilda Ball hilly.b49@googlemail.com
- Treasurer: Brian Machin treasurer@bristolu3a.org.uk
- Website: Gillian Skinner web@bristolu3a.org.uk
- Judy Parker beaconaccess@bristolu3a.org.uk
- ePost: Linda Soutter publicity@bristolu3a.org.uk
- Newsletter: Joan Gubbin newsletter@bristolu3a.org.uk
- IT Officer: Martin Stubbs u3ait@bristolu3a.org.uk