

# Chalfonts U3A

## Advice for Interest Group Convenors

On behalf of Chalfonts U3A **thank you** for helping to set up and/or manage an Interest Group. We hope you will find your role a rewarding experience and that these guidance notes are useful. Interest Groups are the life blood of the U3a. Although you have agreed to be a Convenor you do not have to be an expert but rather a willing volunteer able to get a new Group off the ground or to take over or share the management of an existing Group.

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## 1. Group Coordinator Role

Your Group Coordinator is Lesley Bedford and together with Eileen Powell, Vice Chair are here to support group convenors. We think it is important for us to liaise with group convenors on a regular basis to identify any concerns, help with any arrangements and give our support. We want to encourage new groups and ensure that the information on our website is current, this means group convenors keeping us up to date with group activities, when you meet, where you meet and an accurate description of your group. We aim to hold an annual meeting and as a thank you to our convenors where we are able to meet up, share ideas and of course enjoy the food!

**Groups Coordinator Lesley Bedford – 07970848617. Email [groupcoordinator@chalfontsu3a.org.uk](mailto:groupcoordinator@chalfontsu3a.org.uk)**

## 2. Starting a Group

Each interest group has a convenor who is largely free to run the group as they wish, within the principles of the u3a and with the guidance of the Groups Coordinator. You may also find you will have members with expertise and are able to demonstrate and share these skills.

There are no fixed periods about how often groups meet and they can decide when they run and break for holidays.

The Group Convenor should maintain an up-to date group list using the Beacon system and training will be given to help with this. The purpose of this list is to inform group members of the dates, times and venues of group meetings or organised events.

So how do we get a new group off the ground? Anyone wishing to find out if a new group could be formed should contact the Groups Coordinator who will publicise the proposal via the monthly Members' Meeting, the Newsletter and on the Website. We have a large number of interest groups and the process of starting a group is to have an informal meeting with interested parties and then decide where and when the group will meet etc. The guide to Interest Groups can be found on the Chalfonts U3A website, under the heading "Interest Groups".

### **3. Interest Groups: Subject Content**

Our Interest Groups are many and varied. We should ensure that all members feel welcome at the groups they attend. Groups need to consider what they wish to achieve from their group, what knowledge is already available within the group and the resources members can contribute. All group members should be involved in the running of the group and meetings should be fun. It is appreciated that some groups will be led by experts whilst others will divide responsibility for research and preparation amongst members. Where paid instructors are being considered this should be discussed with the Groups Coordinator or Eileen Powell, Vice Chair.

### **4. Activities and Materials**

Consider also what study methods are available, for example text books, other reading material, DVD's and material available online. Are there any volunteer experts who can demonstrate and share their skills? Please also take advantage of the resources available from U3A National Office, [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) which has experts ready to advise on the range of appropriate study materials available from the U3A National Office resource centre. Subject Advisors appear in each issue of the Third Age Matters.

### **5. Membership Check and Attendance Register**

Convenors should satisfy themselves that members attending their interest group have an up to date membership and also a record of attendance. Names of group members should be listed on the Chalfonts U3A Beacon website, and updated as required. Instruction on access to and use of the Beacon system can be given by Vince Barker, Beacon Administrator, [beaconadmin@chalfontsu3a.org.uk](mailto:beaconadmin@chalfontsu3a.org.uk) and written guidance is also provided. The Beacon system is designed to make your life easier by having an up to date list of members and facility for sending group emails. Full training of the Beacon system will be given and is very straightforward. Convenors need not personally enter information on to the Beacon system; they can appoint an administrator or helper. Members can invite a guest to Interest Group activities, but only if this does not prevent a

group member from attending the activity. Guests can only be invited up to three times in a U3A year. The insurance policy covering public liability risks only covers members of Chalfonts U3A.

It is important that all activities are risk assessed in advance of the activity taking place, in particular consideration of the requirements of the activity and the level of health and capability required. Any incidents that occur during group meetings should be recorded and reported on the relevant incident form and be given to the Groups Coordinator. The Leisure Centre and the CSPCC have their own incident report procedures and staff should be informed of any health and safety related issues that occur.

## 6. Finances and Your Group

Each U3A Committee is responsible for all financial transactions within their own U3A.

Monies collected from group members relating to room hire costs or to cover the costs of u3a trips are paid into the u3a bank accounts. Detailed guidance on managing group finances is available from the Treasurer and Finance Officer. Emails are [Treasurer@chalfontsu3a.org.uk](mailto:Treasurer@chalfontsu3a.org.uk) and [Financeofficer@chalfontsu3a.org.uk](mailto:Financeofficer@chalfontsu3a.org.uk).

Costs of incidentals such as tea and coffee are handled at the discretion of groups and need not be paid into u3a bank accounts. Convenors may claim expenses incurred from running their group, preferably supported by a receipt..

Convenors must ensure that they obtain documentary evidence from any tutors, etc. of public liability insurance and that they are registered with HMRC as self-employed and receipts obtained for any purchases.

## 7. Accommodation/Venue Hire

In order to comply with insurance requirements, the Committee takes responsibility for any contract for accommodation for Interest Groups, whether at the Community Centre or elsewhere. All arrangements should be made through Lesley Bedford, venue Coordinator [venuecoordinator@chalfontsu3a.org.uk](mailto:venuecoordinator@chalfontsu3a.org.uk) who can advise on availability and should be consulted on any proposal for new, or a change in accommodation. In fairness to the Chalfonts U3A membership as a whole, all Interest Groups are self-financing subject to a special provision relating to the cost of venue hire. Many groups will hold meetings in members' homes but it is appreciated that this is not always possible due to group size or group type.

Where a group meets in a hired room just once a month your group will not be charged for room hire (this will be paid by Chalfonts u3a). For groups who meet more frequently than once per month at the CSPCC or Leisure Centre, the group members will need to contribute to the room hire costs for the additional meetings. Specific advice is available regarding how to work out and collect funds from your members for venue hire.

## 8. Data Protection

The protection of members' personal data is of paramount importance. Legislation has been enacted to provide individuals with enhanced rights to access to data held and further responsibilities to those organisations holding such data. Consent requests to use members data solely for u3a purposes have been included in the new Membership Application Form. At Chalfonts U3A we subscribe to the Beacon system. This is a recognised U3A computer system dedicated to the secure storage of members' data. We would urge all convenors/administrators to become users of this system. The system has many benefits, including keeping records up to date and enabling Convenors to transmit emails to group members with ease. Data protection is straightforward and just needs to be applied within the guidelines. Help, advice and guidance is readily available should you require it.

Always ensure that U3a data is only used for U3a activities and is not disclosed to third parties. Group emails that are not sent via Beacon should be sent using the blind copy (bcc) feature. Permission should always be sought before using photographs of members on any page of the U3a website.

## 9. Equipment

There is some equipment that may be useful for groups, such as a projector and laptop and this can be made available on request. These items are kept in the u3a cupboard at the CSPCC, if you are going to make regular use of these items please ask for a key. Any damages or problems with usage of equipment should be made to our webmaster – [webmaster@chalfontsu3a.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@chalfontsu3a.org.uk)

Use can be made of mugs and tablecloths available at the CSPCC.

## 10. General Information

- (a) Convenors should be using Beacon to contact group members but on occasions where this is not possible, you are advised to use the blind copy facility when sending group emails, to assist in maintaining data protection.
- (b) Convenors may find it helpful to download an 8 page "Interest Groups" booklet from U3A National Office via the website: [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

**Thank you again for helping to make such a vital activity with Chalfonts u3a a success.**

**Remember that your Groups Coordinator is always there to give help and advice.**