



The Group Co-ordinator's Folder

Introduction

Thank you for your work as a Matlock Area U3A (MAU3A) co-ordinator. Without you and your fellow co-ordinators there would be no U3A as you are vital to the existence of the groups, themselves the backbone of the organisation.

Within this folder you should find the information you need as a co-ordinator. Some of it you will refer to regularly and some sections are there for reference purposes if and when you need guidance. Should you have a query not covered in the folder, don't hesitate to contact the Groups' Secretary or the relevant member of the Management Committee.

In keeping with our increasingly paperless society, this is an electronic folder with a paper copy kept for reference. An added advantage of the electronic format is its ease of access for you and that it can be kept up to date regularly and quickly. The folder can be found at our website in the 'About the U3A' section under 'Co-ordinators' – [click here](#).

The website is a very useful resource where you will find a lot of information about MAU3A.

The folder has five sections:

- 1. The Aims and Guiding Principles of the U3A**
- 2. The Groups**
- 3. Housekeeping**
- 4. Resources**
- 5. Legal information**

1. The Aims and Guiding Principles of the U3A

MAU3A is part of the ever-growing national network of U3As, all of which operate under the umbrella of the Third Age Trust (TAT). The Third Age Trust defines the U3A thus:

‘The University of the Third Age or U3A offers older people who are no longer in full-time paid employment an opportunity to share their knowledge, experience and talents with others, and also the chance to learn from each other in friendly surroundings. The U3A aims to demonstrate the benefits and enjoyment to be gained and the new horizons to be discovered in learning throughout life’.

2. The Groups

The Co-ordinator should apply the MAU3A groups’ approach by:

- a) Maintaining a positive attitude and encouraging as many members as possible to play an active part in decision making
- b) Ensuring that the activities selected reflect the interests of the majority of members
- c) Maintaining communication links with the Management Committee via the Groups’ Secretary

When should meetings be held?

This is a group decision. Some groups meet weekly, some fortnightly and some monthly. It is unusual for there to be another format, though if members choose a different pattern, that’s fine. The length of the meetings is, again, a decision for the group members themselves.

Groups always need to be on the lookout for potential clashes with other groups. For any newly formed groups, the best thing would be to look at the website where all groups are listed with the days, times and frequency of their meetings.

Where should they be held?

This will very much depend on the size of the group and the type of activity.

Very small groups usually meet in members' homes whilst larger groups usually hire a hall, meeting room or other space. An up-to-date list of venues is held by the Groups' Secretary.

If meetings are in homes, it is suggested that members make a small contribution for light refreshments. If meetings are at a paid venue, the co-ordinator in discussion with the members will agree on a cost per member and the methodology for paying the manager of the premises.

How large should groups be?

This depends upon the nature of the group. Some groups need to be small and would want to limit numbers to perhaps four, five or six members. An example of this could be Italian Conversation. Other groups cap their size at 20 - Art Appreciation 1 did this and a second group was established. Other groups can take very large numbers - an example is the Theatre group which has well over 100 members. Once more, the group itself decides.

Charging

This has been partly covered in that some groups need to pay premises costs and for refreshments but sometimes visitors join a group as a one-off or as a taster. A visitor is defined as anyone not having a MAU3A membership card. The group should decide whether they should be charged at the same rate as members. Visitors can attend for up to three meetings after which time they should apply for membership of MAU3A if they wish to continue to attend.

Paying for speakers

The cost of any speakers should be paid for out of the individual group's funds.

Buying things

All groups are expected to be self-sufficient and to provide their own materials. If, however, a group would like to buy an item to enhance their work, a written request should be made to the Chair of the Management Committee for consideration by the Management Committee. Any purchase made from MAU3A funds becomes a fixed asset available to all members.

Making contributions to the Website and Annual Report

Written contributions for the Annual Report are required in January each year, you will be advised who to send it to. These are collated with the reports from other groups into the Annual Report which is sent to all members and presented at the AGM.

The website needs to be up-to-date and relevant so co-ordinators should check regularly that their section is just that. Photos of recent activities are always welcome and the Webmaster will give advice should it be needed. The website is often the first port of call for potential new members.

Contributions are welcomed from co-ordinators to the regular What's On Newsletter, this is a good opportunity to publicise any events your group may be holding to the wider MAU3A membership.

Open meetings including Coffee Mornings

Sometimes open meetings are held to showcase the wide range of what MAU3A is all about and to encourage new members. Group co-ordinators and hopefully others in the group are encouraged to attend these meetings and to chat informally with existing and potential U3A members. Co-ordinators are also encouraged to attend the regular Coffee Mornings to talk to potential new members.

What to do if the group is getting too big?

The group members will probably, though not always, have set a limit on numbers. If the group is getting up to its capacity, what should be done without closing the door to new members? A waiting list should initially be established and if that is a very short list, often the persons on it can be accommodated quite quickly. If there is quite a lot of interest, a second group should be considered and there are precedents for this within MAU3A. It should be talked through with the Groups' Secretary who will take the proposal for a second group to the Management Committee. Someone needs to be willing to co-ordinate the proposed new group, and the Co-ordinator of the existing group will offer assistance to the second group. Once it has been agreed by the Committee and is formed, it will evolve its own style.

Problems within the group

Occasionally problems arise within any group and no one solution fits all. The best people to solve it are the group members themselves. If a solution

can't be found, the group co-ordinator should talk the issues through with the Groups' Secretary.

One more pleasant 'problem' that can arise as groups evolve over time is that they no longer match their description. An example could be 'Beginners' French' where, after four years, a more appropriate title might be 'Intermediate French'. This could be resolved by proposing re-naming and would also provide an opening for a new Beginners group.

A more difficult problem arises where a group is 'stale' and membership is falling. The group should discuss this and look for solutions such as perhaps a change of focus, more diversification or more sharing of workload. There could be an eventual solution which is that the group has fulfilled its initial remit or run its course and should be disbanded. This is rare but could well become more common where U3As have been in existence for many years.

3. Housekeeping

As with any organisation there are administrative tasks that need to be done. Records need to be kept, not least for health, safety and insurance reasons but also to aid the smooth running of the group.

Contact details of the group, with their permission

The co-ordinator should have contact details for all group members, with their permission. An email distribution list should be established and members should be asked whether copies are open to all members of the group or are blind copies. Alternative contact arrangements should be made for those without computers.

Registers

There is a requirement that registers are kept at every meeting and the registers should include any visitors. This not only fulfils health, safety and insurance requirements but is also a useful record for analysis of attendance. The register should be retained by the Co-ordinator.

Finance

Where applicable, careful financial records should be kept and a return sent to the MAU3A Treasurer twice annually in January and July. This is normally done by the Co-ordinator but in the case of the large groups, it is useful for

one of the members to take on the role of Treasurer. There is a blank Income and Expenditure proforma for these returns on the website – [click here](#).

If the only monies held by a group are those contributed for refreshments, there is no need to complete a return.

If in doubt about any aspects of this important task, don't hesitate to discuss with the Treasurer of the Management Committee.

Communication

Group co-ordinators fulfil a vital role in disseminating information to group members. This could be information from a range of sources – TAT, MAU3A management committee or from other groups. Communication from outside groups should be relevant to the purpose of the interest group and we should not send members emails advertising non U3A events which are not relevant to the group, even if they have come from a member. Co-ordinators could consider including extra events or information which is relevant to the group at the end of a regular email, thus not over burdening the members with extra unwanted emails. If in doubt or needing further guidance, contact the Groups' Secretary.

4. Resources

There is a range of resources available to assist groups, some of it local and some national.

Local resources

MAU3A was fortunate in its application for lottery funding for audio visual equipment and groups are positively encouraged to use it. The range of what is available is listed on the website – [click here](#). It is strongly recommended that a member or members of groups wishing to use the equipment should receive training from the Equipment Officer. The equipment is stored at St Elphin's Audley, Darley Dale and should be booked out by checking the electronic diary for availability then contacting the Equipment Officer. All the procedures for this can be found at the website link above.

National resources

The U3A Resource Centre at Bromley has a wealth of really good resources available – slides, CDs, DVDs etc. and lists of available materials are available from the Resource Centre which can be contacted at

resource.centre@U3A.org.uk or 020 8315 0199. There is no charge made to borrow materials apart from the cost of the return postage. You should register as a Resource Centre user, which will enable you to borrow materials and also to browse materials online.

Another useful national resource is the list of Subject Advisers, sometimes listed in the magazine Third Age Matters or their contact details can be obtained from national.office@u3a.org.uk or on 020 8466 6139 or on line at the U3A website. It is worth registering on the U3A website <http://www.u3a.org.uk/> – it is very informative and will give you access to a range of helpful information.

For many interest areas there is a subject Newsletter with helpful information, not least about what other U3As are doing.

Third Age Matters is a magazine published by TAT which comes quarterly to all U3A members. It has a range of interesting articles and is a good and helpful read.

Learning networks

These can be local or national. They are learning opportunities provided by working with other groupings – perhaps another U3A or several, with a University or, for example, a local history society or bird watching group. The possibilities are limitless.

5. Legal information

Public Liability Insurance

This can be a bewildering area but the U3A has issued a comprehensive document which is available on the website – [click here](#).

All MAU3A members are covered by Public Liability Insurance as are visitors up to the limit set by Matlock Area U3A i.e. up to three meetings. Beyond that limit, there is an expectation that the visitors will become U3A members. Non-members who regularly accompany members on, for example, visits to the theatre are regarded differently. U3A guidance states that 'On an occasional basis with committee approval, there is no problem but it is not acceptable for the same non-member to regularly attend U3A events'. MAU3A members at house meetings are covered by the PL Insurance.

Risk assessment

There is no actual requirement to carry out formal risk assessments though there are checklists for groups such as walking groups and for workshops.

Accident report forms

At every meeting or visit, co-ordinators should have a copy of the Accident Report Form – [click here](#). In the unlikely event of an accident, the form should be completed by the co-ordinator and the person sustaining the accident and then submitted to the Chair of the Management Committee.

First aid / life saving

There is no requirement for groups to have a qualified first-aider – insurance advice is to contact the emergency services immediately in the event of a serious incident, even if there happens to be a member present who has attended a first-aid course.

Car-sharing

There is no requirement for extra insurance cover. Any accident arising from the driving of a vehicle would fall outside the scope of a Public Liability Insurance because motor insurance is an entirely separate matter and such incidents are properly covered under a motor insurance policy.

Conclusion

We hope that this folder will prove a useful resource for you as you carry out your role of co-ordinator. If there is anything not covered or you have any queries, don't hesitate to ask the relevant member of the Management Committee. Once more, thank you very much for your hard work.