

## Interest Groups – Frequently Asked Questions

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### **What is an Interest Group Convenor?**

A Convenor is a member of U3A Ellesmere who takes the lead role in an interest group, ably assisted by other group members as required, to ensure the continued success of the group. No qualifications are required to lead a group but knowledge of and/or experience of the subject is an advantage but not essential. Anyone can do it and it is great fun, as you all enjoy an activity together.

#### **1. Who Can Join an Interest Group?**

It is the policy of U3A Ellesmere that anyone who wishes to join one of our Interest Groups MUST be a member of our U3A, even if he/she is a member of another U3A.

#### **2. How does a new group get started?**

In two main ways: like-minded members agree to get together to discuss a way forward, plan future activities and agree who will do what. Or, someone with a particular interest tries to form a group, has a clear idea of an initial programme and gets approval from group members to lead it, with help as required. If you are interested to start a new group, advertise your intention through the Groups' Coordinator, who is usually a member of the committee. Choose a meeting time and place, (the Groups' Coordinator may be able to help you find a spare time slot), a group name, and ask the Groups' Coordinator to publicise this for you, and provide a contact name and telephone number for anyone interested. At your first meeting, members can discuss and agree a way forward for the group with proposed activities and a future agreed meeting time and place. Do you want to meet in members' houses on a rota, in your house, or do you wish to hire a meeting room, or simply meet outside at an agreed location each time?

#### **3. Is it OK to start a second group if an existing group is full?**

Yes, this is encouraged. The most popular activity in U3A nationally seems to be walking and many U3As have several different walking groups to cater for the high demand. Try to ensure that the new group day and time do not conflict with the existing group's activities but this is not always possible. The Groups' Coordinator may be able to advise on this.

#### **4. If our new group needs to buy materials or hire a room can we get initial financial help?**

The principle is that all groups are financially self sufficient.

#### **5. How can we ensure that room hire costs are always covered?**

If you need to hire a room regularly the best way to cover costs is probably to ask for payment from members to cover a 6-8 week period, or similar. This guarantees room costs are covered no matter how many members turn up each time. And members are more likely to turn up if they have already paid. Consider a summer break in activities as numbers may drop off as members take a holiday. Be flexible.

## **6. Once our group is established what else do we need to think about?**

You should tell the Groups' Coordinator:

- when vacancies exist so that this can be advertised on the U3A Ellesmere website and in the newsletter;
- when you have a waiting list so that the need for the formation of an additional group can be considered;
- when one of your members dies so that no insensitive contact is made with their family, or if a member moves out of the area (and wishes to leave U3A Ellesmere) so that the Membership Secretary can be advised;
- of any changes in your group's name, format, meeting time or place;
- if the group should fail and cease to meet.

## **7. If we receive money from and spend it on behalf of our members, what records should we keep?**

- a) If your group structure and activity is such that no money is involved, there are obviously no financial records to be kept. Quite a lot of groups have no financial commitments.
- b) For Interest Groups which take in only nominal amounts of cash (for example, to pay on a week-by-week basis for refreshments, room hire, etc.), a simple cash book should be kept in which the amounts paid in and out can be noted. The cash book should be available for all members of the group to inspect.  
If the group ceases to meet any balance should be handed to the U3A Ellesmere treasurer.
- c) For groups that expect to handle larger sums talk to the U3A Ellesmere treasurer.

For all advice and to answer any queries on handling monies, please do not hesitate to contact the Treasurer.

## **8. Are Non-U3A-Members allowed to sample our activities?**

Yes, non-U3A-members may attend a limited number of monthly meetings as a visitor. Similarly a non-member may attend an Interest Group, (with Convenor permission), to see if they like an activity, prior to their applying to join U3A Ellesmere. Non-member attendance is limited to 3 visits per year maximum for both monthly meetings and for group activities. Beyond that they must join or be put on a waiting list to join and no further attendance allowed in that year until they are a member. Convenors are asked to monitor the situation, to ensure the attendance as a non-member does not continue indefinitely, as this may compromise our insurance cover.

## **9. Are we supposed to have First Aiders in our Group?**

There is no requirement on any group to include a First Aid qualified member, or to hold, or carry, a First Aid kit. There are no recommendations as to what a First Aid kit, if held, might include. However, some Convenors do carry a basic First Aid kit during walks for example, so if you'd feel more comfortable then take a basic kit with you. If a member needs urgent medical attention however, your group should contact Emergency Services, who will advise the caller on any immediate action thought necessary, and who will manage emergency recovery.

## **10. Do you want news of our activities?**

Yes we most certainly do, even if your Interest Group has a waiting list, you are strongly encouraged to submit regular reports of your past and future activities (with photographs if possible) to both the

newsletter and website. The newsletter may be restricted to the amount that can be written and number of photos which could be included (check this with the Editor), but there are no such restrictions for your webpage.

### **11. Does U3A Ellesmere have a Refund Policy? Yes, as follows**

- a) It is for the Convenor of each Interest Group to decide on a refund policy which best suits the needs of his/her own group.
- b) Generally, once a ticket/place has been booked and paid for by a U3A Ellesmere member for an outing or event, that member is responsible for the re-sale of that ticket/place if he/she can no longer attend for any reason. The re-sale of this unwanted ticket/place should ideally be to another U3A Ellesmere member but could, with the agreement of the Convenor, be sold to a non-member.
- c) If possible, the Convenor will try to help 'off-load' this unwanted ticket/place, and particularly if there is a Waiting List for the outing/event, but it is not for the Interest Group nor U3A Ellesmere to refund these pre-paid monies as a matter of course.
- d) If the Interest Group's funds allow, it is entirely at the Convenor's discretion as to whether the reason for the unwanted ticket warrants a refund.

### **12. What if we need further advice?**

Interest Groups are the lifeblood of our U3A and the Committee will help and advise about setting up a new group if asked. Contact our Groups' Coordinator, or Chairman, or ask an experienced Convenor for advice as required.