

FEEDBACK FROM GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Many thanks to all who attended and helped by contributing to the very animated discussions.

These notes attempt to capture some of the main points raised. I hope that they are of use to you.

Angie Grain

All agreed that our Interest Groups are of vital importance to the health and vitality of our U3As.

ISSUES RELATED TO INTEREST GROUPS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

- Starting new groups to keep our U3A vibrant
- Who supports the Group Leaders and the Groups Co-ordinator?
- Groups need enthusiastic 'Drivers'
- Waiting lists
- Support existing groups whilst starting new ones
- Promoting the self-help philosophy
- Succession planning
- Funding of groups
- Finding more venues (perhaps try cafes, pubs, residential homes etc etc)
- Diversity; adapting to ageing membership

FROM THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1) How do you encourage new Interest Groups? What problems do you have to overcome?

- ✓ Advertise/e-mail/website/newspapers for ideas
- ✓ Speak at monthly meetings
- ✓ Getting a leader to whip up enthusiasm
- ✓ Confidence is needed, rather than expertise
- ✓ Ask NEW members; find their interests/skills
- ✓ Prompted by full groups to create #2 ones
- ✓ Put potential lists on websites/e-mails
- ✓ Get ideas from national office/TAM

- Members reluctant to lead new groups; try dividing responsibilities

- Timetabling problem (clashes) – perhaps try meetings on alternate weeks
- Perceived or real lack of IT skills
- Have a ‘New Members’ Link person
- Break the perception that expertise is needed/ promote self-help, self-led

2) What do you do about Group Waiting Lists?

- Be aware of them; it may be that no central info is held
- Have good relations with Group Leaders
- Contact GLs regularly to find out
- Consider buddying for duplicate group
- Managing non-attendance and consider removing non-attenders from full groups
- Never say ‘No’ to those wanting to join a group – take details
- Get together the folk on Waiting List – to set up the duplicate group; encourage some from existing group to join it to provide knowledge, experience etc
- Ask GLs for their waiting lists
- Limit time to be a member of a group?? (2-3 years??)
- Address venue limitations – look for larger alternative
- GL can seem to ‘own’ a group; discourages new leaders.

3) Do you have any good ideas about supporting and encouraging Group Leaders?

- National Subject Advisers
- Personal support from Groups Co-ordinator (Can create pressure problems)
- Handbook/guidelines – on paper and on website. Give paper copy to all New GLs.
- GLs are ‘**Organisers**’, not ‘**Experts**’
- Training session and/or event; Regular (??Quarterly ?) GLs’ meetings; GLs should set the agenda – it’s their meeting; social part to the meeting with Chair’s appreciation to GLs
- Have a GL Development Officer to help with issues
- Try twinning a group with another U3A
- Share experiences; mentoring/buddying of new/experienced GLs
- Suggested GLs’ conference (?? *Not sure at what level this means - AG*)
- (Craven) some GLs get honorary membership as they don’t want to join any other groups.
- Have ‘Job Descriptions’ for GLs (??)
- Have structures or templates to support GLs (e.g. ICE cards)
- Have info on venues readily available for new GLs

4) How do you support the Groups Convenor/Co-ordinator? Delegation? Sharing the load?

- ‘Activities Development Group’ – convened by Groups Co-ordinator; Team approach – ‘bite-sized’ pieces
- Support via ‘Clusters’
- Have a system for managing equipment and venue booking
- Encourage ‘Deputies’
- Succession planning is a problem if the job is too onerous

FROM THE FLIPCHARTS – examples of small, new or unusual Interest groups

Camping and Caravanning	Barnsley
DIY Coffins	Pocklington
Motorcycling	Ilkley & District
Yachting	Scarborough (<i>others might find that a challenge!?</i> AG ☺)
Scottish Country dancing	Scarborough
Canoeing	Scarborough
Kite Flying	Filey
Aeromodelling	Ilkley & District
Weekenders	Haxby & Wiggington
Pop-up Pottery	Sherburn
Pantomime	Sherburn
Walking and Talking German	?
Serendipity	?
Dry Stone Walling	Settle
Group linked to Yorks Wildlife Trust	Doncaster (based at at Potteric Carr)
Relaxation/Mindfulness	?
Historic Houses	Ilkley & District

Offering information/talks by other voluntary organisations
Try trawling the websites of other U3As in the region

See also: sources.u3a.org.uk/index-of-the-rare