

Frequent Queries relating to U3A activity during Covid 19 lockdown

This document, originally produced by the South East Regional U3A Support Team (see last page), is intended to support U3As in keeping up to date with all the latest advice and guidance during the current period of lockdown.



The national website contains a new category in the Advice area (www.u3a.org.uk/advice) called Running your U3A during COVID 19. The new area pulls together the advice which is specific to U3As during the pandemic including advice on AGMs, insurance and risk assessment for outside and remote activities. You will need to use your member login as you would normally do to access any information in the dedicated Advice area. Obviously, the Advice produced by the Third Age Trust reflects the Government guidelines at the time. These change periodically so it is essential that U3As regularly check this section of the website and review local implementation.

Within this Advice is a Guidance document that all U3As should review before recommencing any outdoor activities. The document includes the measures a U3A should take to ensure the safety of members. For Group Leaders and individual participants, a Risk Assessment/Checklist for running outdoor activities has been created (see below). This should be completed when deciding to take part.

The situation is complex with different guidance for individuals dependent upon age, health and household situations. It is for this reason that the ultimate decision to take part in any U3A activity, that is being resumed with additional safety measures in place, **lies with the individual member**, considering the question for themselves. As at 1st June 2020, in England, the rules for meeting together are for up to 6 people, anywhere outdoors, 2 metres apart.

Insurance cover

Please follow the detailed guidelines prepared in the new Advice section as detailed above. If the U3A Committee concludes that the guidance as above has been implemented and that all has been done to enable participants to safely take part in the activity, then members would be covered by the U3A Public and Products Liability Insurance, details of which are on the website.

Other useful links to general COVID 19 advice can be found on the national website under Keep Well (www.u3a.org.uk/Covid-advice-links). If you have further questions, contact the YAHE Regional Trustee, sue.stokes@u3a.org.uk or National Office by e-mail (national.office@u3a.org.uk) or by phoning 020 8466 6139.

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Covid 19 Guidance and Risk Check List for Outdoor Activities, 1.6.2020

As from Monday 1 June 2020 Government guidance for England about Covid-19 changed. The whole advice can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>

3.1 Key Points from Government Website:

3.1.1 For the general public who are fit and well

In line with scientific advice that the risk of transmitting the virus is much lower outside, the Government is permitting more social activity outside. You can spend time outdoors with members of your own household and, from Monday 1 June, you can meet in a gathering of up to six people you do not live with. This can be in a public outdoor space, or in a private garden or uncovered yard or terrace.

The more people you have interactions with, the more chances we give the virus to spread. When seeing friends and family outdoors:

It would be sensible to keep the total number of people you see limited - especially over short periods of time

When you leave your home, you should follow the guidelines on staying safe outside your home. Most importantly, this includes the key advice that you should stay two metres apart from anyone outside of your household.

Face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are in an enclosed space where social distancing is difficult and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet, for example – if using public transport to access activities.

If you are showing coronavirus symptoms, or if you or any of your household are self-isolating (including if you have been contacted by the test and trace programme), you should stay at home - this is critical to staying safe and saving lives.

3.1.2 People aged over 70 and those who are clinically vulnerable

Some people, including those aged 70 and over, those with specific chronic pre-existing conditions and pregnant women, are clinically vulnerable, meaning they are at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. As we begin to ease restrictions, this group who are clinically vulnerable should continue to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their household.

People who are defined as extremely clinically vulnerable.

There is a further group of people who are defined, also on medical grounds, as clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus – that is, people with specific serious health conditions. They are advised to continue shielding to keep themselves safe by staying at home and avoiding gatherings or, if individuals wish to spend time outdoors, to take extra care to minimise contact with others by keeping two metres apart at all times.

3.2 Points to Note:

The government is still asking all people to consider the amount of contact that they have with others even within the six person limitation.

There are further considerations as to the amount of external contact if you are over 70 or clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable.

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It is important to consider any activity against this government advice which for everyone is to minimize contact with others as much as possible.

3.3 Risk assessment:

To make an assessment of whether you should undertake any activity, the advice is that it is important to carry out a risk assessment **as you would do for any U3A activity**.

In the case of resuming an outdoor U3A exercise activity there would be two elements to any risk assessment to be considered. It is strongly advised that you record any assessment before taking part in activity.

The first part of the risk assessment is to identify the overall hazards and risks involved in the actual activity you intend taking part in and how the Government guidelines are accommodated in how you will undertake the activity. In particular the clear advice from Government about ensuring social distancing and how this will be maintained throughout the activity.

Secondly, it is advised that each person participating undertakes a personal participation risk assessment considering the Covid-19 risks and hazards that taking part poses to the individual and, if applicable, to those with whom they live. It is imperative that everyone completes a personal assessment of this nature, records it and makes it known to their group coordinator.

This is important because there are differing requirements for people with different health conditions - clinically vulnerable, or clinically extremely vulnerable people of different ages, members living in a household where there is someone who is considered clinically vulnerable, or clinically extremely vulnerable and therefore has limitations on contact with others.

The personal participation risk assessment takes into consideration a person's physical health and any underlying issues, age and the health and circumstances of those they may be living with or isolating with in their household.

To assist U3As to make a thorough assessment of their group activities and the activity risks involved, please refer to the [General Outdoor Activity Risk Assessment Checklist - U3A-KMS-FRM-014](#) (below) which everyone should view and complete including the personal section before considering taking part.

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General Outdoor Activity Risk Assessment Checklist

U3A Name	
Interest Group	
Date Location/Postcode	
Nature and Description of Activity	

<p>Part 1: Before the activity Group Organiser Check list:</p> <p>a) Consider the current Government and Public Health advice in relation to your location and the feasibility of carrying out this activity safely adhering to present social distancing requirements and permissible out-door activities. (for example currently outdoor activities are still restricted to work, shopping and exercise but this is changing and will need to be checked)</p> <p>b) Consider whether your activity involves the sharing of any equipment or shared spaces and make suitable arrangements to have antiviral cleaning products available.</p> <p>c) Where necessary inspect area prior to starting activity to ensure adequate social distancing can be maintained throughout and to remove/isolate any hazards.</p> <p>d) Ensure travel arrangements also meet the necessary requirements</p> <p>e) Consider the general hazards related to this type of activity, the impact accommodating Covid19 requirements may have on the way it is organised. These may relate to the numbers permitted to take part at any one time, location and potential congestion areas, obstacles, fitness levels required, appropriate dress, weather conditions etc</p> <p>f) Record outcome of these considerations in writing prior to the activity and share with participants so they can complete their personal checklist in line with the information in your checklist.</p>	Yes (✓)
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<p>Before Activity Personal Checklist:</p> <p>a) All participants to review their own personal health and circumstances and refer to current Government guidance for different risk categories in Covid19 and what measures are recommended for people over 70 and/or with various medical conditions.</p> <p>b) Consider the health risk category of anyone else you are isolating with in your household.</p> <p>c) Review the risk check list for the activity above completed by the group organiser and consider if you can take part without adverse risk to yourself or household.</p>	Yes (✓)
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Part 1. Activity Checklist outcomes:	Yes (✓)
Signed Group Organiser:	Dated

Part 2. Personal Checklist Outcomes:	Yes (✓)
Signed	Dated

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Subscriptions

National membership fee (formerly referred to as Capitation) is payable to the Third Age Trust in April each year by every U3A. This fee, currently £3.50 per year per member, would have been collected in the local U3A's subscription during the year 2019 – 2020 and is paid in arrears, based on the highest number of members in that U3A in the previous year. This fee has remained the same for 10 years although the number of U3As has grown to more than 1040 with 440,000 members.

Whilst National Office staff have been working from home, they and the Board continue to advise and support U3As during this difficult period. The Trust is also pressing ahead with the Development Plan in which there is a commitment to upgrading a number of systems including Beacon, the website, learning opportunities and raising the profile of the U3A. These have all incurred costs and cannot be temporarily 'turned off'. During the lockdown, this fee continues to cover a variety of insurances, staffing and organisation of tutorials and webinars: some of those will be referred to later.

The national website is being updated constantly with relevant material (not always easy to find but better times are coming!). The Facebook page 'U3A: Keeping in Touch' has proved very popular with members exchanging ideas, opinions, jokes, photos etc. There is also a U3A Facebook page and a Twitter account, and many newsletters and mailings have been sent out from the office.

Local membership fees

Each U3A is operationally independent within the Trust and Charity Commission guidelines. Some U3As have regular financial commitments such as Beacon, Third Age Matters, a dedicated website, payments to Zoom etc, as well as the national subscription. When considering the level of membership fees to charge in the current, and forthcoming, year such items should be taken into consideration. These charges could increase.

A U3A may have sizeable reserves that could be used to supplement a lower annual membership fee in the forthcoming year. Most U3As have not paid venue fees for several months and this may continue for an unknown period. Consideration should also be made as to the number of members who will return to participate in U3A activities.

If a U3A uses Beacon, the £1 per annum per member should be added to calculations. Additionally, there is the £3.50 National annual subscription per member and, if your membership fee includes Third Age Matters, this is a current cost of £3.10 for postage. Some U3As have already given a reduction to their members and some are not prepared to risk reducing their fees this year but may do so next year. It is not recommended to waive fees as the future is still uncertain.

The U3A's committee should make this decision by considering what is fair and reasonable and notify members as best as possible in order to invite comment. In normal circumstances this would be approved at an AGM but these are extraordinary times.

Annual General Meeting

Third Age Trust Advice to U3As for holding a legitimate AGM for 2020 and managing AGM action where physical meeting is not possible:

Look at your constitution! It will tell you about the timing of your AGM for example. Should it be held every year or can it be held within 15 months of the previous one?

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Quorum

The U3A's constitution usually has a clause that says if a quorum at an AGM is not achieved the AGM can be reconvened at a later date, when the quorum is those attending. (*If this is not the case, contact National Office on 020 8466 6139 to discuss the options available to you*). This clause means that the AGM could be reconvened at a monthly meeting when lockdown ends. To take advantage of this, the Committee would need to advise their membership as soon as possible that it is their intention to call the AGM at the usual point in the calendar but that it is unlikely, given the lockdown, that the quorum would be achieved and, therefore, the AGM would be reconvened at a later date. Keep a record of these decisions that you make collectively (i.e. Government Advice during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Retirement of Trustees

Committee members who wish to step down can still do so and can be replaced by new committee members using the casual vacancy clause. If there is no successor and the committee member is due to step down as they have reached the end of their term of office, they may continue in post until the next AGM when the vacancy would be filled according to the constitution. Any new trustees elected during this period can be properly elected when the AGM takes place.

Charity Committee (CC) advice re 'Holding meetings online'

In the current situation it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold face to face meetings. Some charities have clauses in their governing documents that allow them to meet virtually or to use telephone facilities. Committee members are advised to check and see if they can make amendments themselves to facilitate changes as to how or when meetings are held. Where there is no such clause and it is decided to hold meetings over the 'phone or digitally, the Charity Commission will understand. However, this decision should be recorded saying the Committee are holding meetings in this way to demonstrate good governance of the charity. This allows virtual meetings using a system such as Zoom or a teleconferencing facility, for example. Minutes of the proceedings and decisions made should be recorded in the normal manner.

How do we implement CC advice?

In order to use the CC option the Committee would need to:

- Have a virtual committee meeting to plan the AGM and formally note that you were holding an AGM via video conferencing due to the restrictions of COVID 19.
- Formally notify your membership of this decision, allowing the usual advance notice period regarding elections and resolutions (e.g. the notice should be sent by e-mail and by post to those without e-mail or where possible asking members living nearby to post a notice through a letterbox). The timelines in your constitution for running a normal AGM would need to be followed (or exceeded but not reduced)
- State your intentions for hosting the meeting, inviting attendees via telephone and internet to join. All constitutional requirements should be followed (e.g. a quorum is required if stated in the document).
- Record methods of hosting and inviting attendees to the meeting. You would then hold your virtual AGM following business in the same way that you would a normal AGM, including the appointment of Tellers to ratify outcomes of voting.
- Complete draft minutes for the AGM and notify the membership of decisions made
- Send any updated constitution to the Trust.

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For further information on running an AGM go to the national website – Advice section (login required) and follow this thread:

Running your U3A during Covid 19/scroll down to 2.3. Related documentation/first item Committee Meetings and Minutes/scroll down to 4. Annual General Meetings

Zoom and other Video Conferencing

For access to free tutorials please visit (Online Events/about/events/online-events)

Zoom offers free conferencing and messaging across any device with up to 100 participants, free of charge, with a 40 minute time limit on meetings. Participants can leave the meeting at the end and return a few minutes later by pressing on the same link and the meeting will run for a further 40 minutes.

It has a user friendly screen layout and can host a reasonable number of visible people.

Skype – make and receive free voice and video calls over the internet using a computer, web browser or mobile phone with Android and IOS (Apple) operating systems. For larger meetings, Zoom may offer better video stability.

Jitsi – a free, no registration video conferencing application that can be used via the web on a desktop PC or on phones and tablets.

Life size Go – free unlimited group video conferencing with up to 8 participants.

Google Duo – simple, high quality video calls for smartphones, tablets and computers.

Google Meet – free for Google account holders and can host large meetings of up to 100 attendees. Meeting host needs to have a gmail account and non-gmail users need to be granted access to the meeting

Microsoft Teams – built on Microsoft 365 groups and offers audio and video calling, easy file sharing via Sharepoint and chat features.

Zoom appears the most popular of these amongst U3As. Many use the free version and manage with the 40 minutes or have a 10 minute tea break and return for another 40 minutes. Some U3As pay a monthly subscription for Zoom Pro which is about £13 per month and allows unlimited time. This pays for one licence and more can be obtained at an increased cost.

Some U3As arrange several group meetings for the same time. Attendees wait in a 'Waiting Room' (advised for all meetings) until the host invites them in. The host can then allocate the individual groups to 'Breakout Rooms' where they can hold their meeting and can then come back together at a set time if so required.

National Office has organised several excellent tutorials on Zoom. Contact the office if you are interested or book online. These tutorials will continue whilst there is a demand for them.

The future – who knows?

Many questions are being asked and at present there are no easy answers. It may be that some venues will open before the end of this year but it is noticeable from the Keeping in Touch Facebook page that members seem very cautious and will vote with their feet. The question is whether members will renew if there is no social contact until 2021.

Keeping contact now with as many members as possible is crucial. Many U3As are very proactive, running many virtual groups and even putting on shows via Zoom.

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Also vital is maintaining contact with those who are not comfortable with, or do not have access to, technology so that they do not feel forgotten.

Some U3As are now having speaker meetings on Zoom. Numbers may be low to begin with but hopefully word will spread and more members will join in.

At all times, government advice must be adhered to and insurance cover will be in place as long as the regulations are observed. At this time only 6 people can meet together outside whilst observing social distancing.

Maybe the future will offer 'blended' learning opportunities that we had not envisaged before the pandemic. The Learning Committee and Subject Advisers are exploring innovative ways of doing things in the future. Zoom may be a way of offering contact to those people who have problems getting to physical meetings. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee is looking at such matters. Technology such as Zoom could offer more unusual groups and more advanced group (e.g. Advanced Mathematics) to function countrywide rather than just locally, thus removing more barriers.

Sadly, caution is the key at present but we have to ensure that this wonderful organisation continues and thrives.

Maybe a local re-launch for U3As?

Time for some blue sky thinking!

*With thanks to the South East Regional U3A Support Team:

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