



GROUP CONVENOR INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE BOOKLET

INTRODUCTION

This booklet talks about the roles and duties of BNB Group Convenors and necessary procedures to establish, run, modify and close an interest group in the BNB U3A. It should also help enable the smooth running of groups and activities whilst complying with the principles and rules of the U3A.

The booklet is made up of two parts. The first part contains the, what to do bits and is short and to the point. The second part gives detailed information/explanations and is designed to give reasons why things and certain actions are needed. It may sound daunting but remember the committee is there to help and give support.

Most of the information, especially in part two is taken from U3A national publications which can be viewed on the U3A web site.

As you will see in the 'Definitions of groups and the people who run them' section an interest group is just a group of people getting together to mutually learn from each other's experience, undertake a programme of study, or simply enjoy the social aspect of an activity. However this simple situation is surrounded by constraints in respect of statutory requirements, the requirements of U3A and the natural requirements of polite and sociable interactions. This booklet is intended to define those constraints and responsibilities in a way that is of minimum work to effect a smooth and easy administered organisation whilst maintain the requirements of the organisation and the law.

ADMINISTRATION

Attendance sheets

The attendance sheets are necessary for financial compliance and health and safety needs and insurance.

- Group Attendance sheets must be signed by all attendees as they will be used for a roll-call in case of building evacuation and for insurance purposes. This includes sessions held in peoples' homes as well as hired venues.
- People ticking the gift aid column of the sheets must be UK tax payers in the current tax year and they should also have completed the gift aid form provided by the membership secretary.
- The amount paid by the attendee should be entered in full. The sheet and all monies should then go to the treasurer. Payments to the centre being used will be made by the treasurer on receipt of an invoice. This process is necessary for the treasurer to have a paper trail for auditing purposes. Groups using the Bulkington Library as a venue must get the completed attendance sheet photocopied and the copy given to the Library (Attn., of Mary Beaumont)
- New participants do not need to pay for the first two sessions they attend. However, they need to sign the form for H&S and insurance purposes. The payment column box should show 'new to group'
- Attendance sheets also need to be signed when groups meet at peoples' homes. This is for insurance purposes.
- At the end of each month the Monthly Return Gift Aid Form must be sent to the Treasurer. This form is used to collate the information on the number of times a person who ticks the Gift Aid column of the Attendance Sheet during the month.
- For a copy of the attendance sheet see Appendices.
- For a copy of the Monthly Return Gift Aid Form see Appendices

Group members' contact details

To help with communication with group members the use of a Contact Details list is important. It is also strongly recommended to have an emergency contact number in case a member becomes ill during a group meeting. The list should be retained in the Attendance Sheet Folder.

For a copy of the Contact Details list and Venue information see Appendices

Venue Information

The name, address and contact details of the venue for your Group's meetings should be show in the Group Attendance Booklet. This information is useful, in case of emergencies; especially the Post Code which may be needed by the emergency services for Sat-Nav purposes. A space has been allocated on the Group members' contact details page, which should be held in the Group Attendance Folder. See Appendices.

BOOKING AND CANCELLING ACCOMMODATION (ESTABLISHED GROUPS)

Booking Accommodation

- The booking and cancelling of meeting rooms and alterations to times and dates is the responsibility of Group Convenors.
- The St Nicholas monthly meeting room is booked on an on-going basis by St Nicholas office people. However, it would be useful to check this before the end of each calendar year.
- Other venues need to be booked annually. It would be best to book them in September or October of the preceding year so that the accommodation is not booked by other people
- Bulkington VCC monthly meeting room has been booked until the end of 2018.

Cancelling Accommodation

- If you need to cancel a group session the responsible person at the venue should be advised. This is normally at least one week in advance. Failure to do so will mean the U3A will be charged for the room. The Treasurer should also be advised so a check can be made against the invoice from the venue owner/manager.
- The Treasurer must be advised about room bookings, cancellations and alterations in order for the billing and invoicing to be checked prior to payment.

CHANGING GROUP CONVENORS

- If the Group Convenor of any group changes then the Secretary must be advised ASAP so the appropriate people can be advised and also so an induction session can be arranged to enable a smooth transition. This can also be done via the Group Coordinator.

CLOSING DOWN A GROUP

- When considering the closing down of a group you should first contact the group Coordinator, Chairman or Secretary so the committee can be made aware of the situation and they can enquire if extra help or support is needed in order to keep the group running. They will also arrange for any changes to information shown on the web site.
- Ensure all members of the group are aware of the closure so they do not turn up to meetings/sessions which have been cancelled.
- Cancel the accommodation used with the venue owner/manager.
- Advise the Treasurer about the closure and the date from when the cancellation of the accommodation becomes effective. This is needed to ensure the U3A is not billed in error.

DEFINITIONS OF GROUPS AND THE PEOPLE WHO RUN THEM

In the past Group Convenors were known as Group Leaders. BNB has changed this so as to fall in line with the standard U3A terminology.

- **DEFINITION OF AN INTEREST GROUP**

Groups or Interest Groups are members of the U3A who choose to pursue an interest together. The size of such a group varies from as few as 2-3 to hundreds. The way each group operates, its choice of venue and subject matter, is determined by the group members themselves, operating within the rules of the U3A.

- **DEFINITION OF GROUP CONVENORS**

Group Convenors are individuals or several individual members of a group who take on responsibility for its operation. Sometimes there may be one Group Convenor, though experience suggests at least two such persons work more efficiently; sometimes the leadership may vary, pass from one member to another or be shared among a number of members. Other titles may be used to describe this role.

- **DEFINITION OF GROUP COORDINATORS**

Group Coordinators are members of U3A who undertake to oversee and support the working of the Interest Groups and to assist in creating and facilitating the work of all such Interest Groups in a U3A. They will be members of the Committee of their U3A and may well help on a wider basis, co-operating with other U3As to the mutual benefit of all.

It is important to remember these definitions as they are the guiding principles behind the rules and recommendations of interest group establishment.

FINANCE

We are governed by the rules set down by the U3A at national level and the information shown in this section covers some of what we can or cannot do.

- Under no circumstances can a group be allowed to open their own bank account.
- All income from donations and attendance fees must be paid into the BNB U3A bank account via the Treasurer.
- The committee has total responsibility for ensuring safe custody of members' money and the trustees are the only people with legal accountability. (Quoted directly from the Committee reference file 28/1/2016)
- Under no circumstances can the U3A pay monies to another charity. This is against law. If you are approached by a charity for a donation the committee must be advised so you can be advised on what you should do.
- Any interest group that requires monies from the BNB funds for the purchase of items needed for the running of the group should contact the Treasurer for information on the procedures we need to follow in order to comply with U3A policy and Trust Laws. It is not a daunting thing to do but we have to get it right or the committee could be faced with legal difficulties and we could lose our Trust status.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS

Ideas on how to increase numbers

- If you have any concerns about low or reducing numbers in the groups you lead speak to the Group Coordinator, Chairman or Secretary. They have access to ideas from National Office and will gladly try and assist. It is understood that new groups can take some time to establish themselves before the numbers increase.

Groups getting too large

- The maximum size of a group is dependent on the accommodation available for the sessions, not just numbers.
- If it is considered that the group is too large to manage or the accommodation is too small then a second group should be considered. The use of waiting lists or closure to new group members is not allowed; by directive of U3A National Office.
- Any queries/concerns on group sizes can be directed to the Group Coordinator, Chairman or Secretary for referral to the committee.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Accidents

- Should any member have an accident when attending a BNB event/session they must comply with the accident reporting procedures of the location they are using. This usually starts with reporting the accident to the owner/manager at the site being used but emergency services help should be called if the situation is deemed serious.
- Accident report forms should also be completed for the site owner/manager.
- It may also be necessary and is desirable to complete an accident/incident report form even if a person is not injured. This then passes responsibility for future incidents to the owner/manager.

Risk Assessments

- There is no formal requirement for risk assessments. However common sense should prevail when attending sessions at any venue. Any queries should be directed to the venue owner/manager.
- If you feel a venue is unsafe it should not be used. Contact a committee member ASAP to advise them of the problem.
- The Trust has prepared a set of checklists covering outside venues, walking and workshop activities. See the BNB website for copies.
- All members are responsible for their own safety but should a member advise you of a safety problem at a venue then you **must** advise the venue owner/manager immediately or they could argue you are responsible.

HELPING MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

As the U3A tends to have its membership made up of people in their golden years we are more likely to have people with disabilities. This section covers the more common disabilities and the considerations we need to make.

People with hearing challenges

- It may be that the site being used has an acoustic loop system. Check with the site owner/manager. If one is available make sure it is switched on and the attendees are advised, so they can switch hearing aids to loop.

People with mobility difficulties

- Most sites have ramps and disabled toilet facilities. Check to see if they are available and that the people affected know where they are.

People with sight challenges

- If you suspect people have a sight problem which is not obvious; quietly ask the person concerned.
- Ensure provisions are in place for people who need to sit near the front of meetings etc.
- Assistance dogs should always be allowed to enter buildings and rooms with their owner.

It is appreciated the above is common sense but the notes are only there as a reminder.

INSURANCE

- The U3A carries insurance but it is a complex issue and queries about any problems should be directed to the Secretary, who will advise on who to contact for advise/claims.

MEMBERS' WELLBEING

Medical conditions

- It is advisable to be aware of any member's medical condition, if possible, so that one is aware of what may be wrong if they appear to be taken ill. This will also help if it becomes necessary to call for ambulances etc.

Who to advise in cases of illness or accidents

- In cases of illness or accidents it may be necessary contact the person's next of kin etc. To facilitate this a contact sheet should be completed. (See appendices)

SETTING UP A NEW GROUP

- People expressing a wish to set up a new group should be pointed to a member of the committee who will be able to help with advice.
- People should not to book any venues or agree any contracts without the committee being involved.
- The committee will offer advice on venues and advertising as well as arranging advice and help on how to run the group within the U3A Guidelines and Trust Laws.

PART TWO

GROUP CONVENOR INFORMATION BOOKLET ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

NATURE OF GROUPS

As it has been said the nature of groups is as diverse as can be imagined. The U3A ranges from the academic (e.g. Ancient Greek History) through to the purely social (e.g. Lunch Group) via such pursuits as art, bridge, computer workshops musical appreciation, poetry, and ukulele bands. All have their particular requirements and special needs in terms of venue, supplies, and administrative support. As such it is impossible to give exact guidelines as to the number of conveners required or the extent of their duties other than the statutory ones and so it is essential that at the beginning of the start of each group an informal meeting is held to discuss this aspect as well as the other issues (See **First Meeting**).

As numbers, personnel and objectives of the groups change it is useful to hold annual meeting to review the convener situation to see if any adjustments are necessary. It is also a good idea to run through the important points of the groups function to ensure that it is still doing what it was set up to do. It is not unusual that work devolves down to a single individual who then feels overloaded with administrative duties that spoil their enjoyment of the group's function. It is suggested here that this review of the group's constitution is reviewed every 12 month at the time of U3A membership renewal.

FIRST MEETING AGENDA

An Agenda for the first meeting and for one that could be held every year is as follows:

AGENDA

- The purpose of the Interest Group
- Preparation /review of a statement of its constitution
- What are our study/learning methods
 1. Suggestion for trips/events
 2. Volunteer experts for demonstration and talks
 3. Books, DVDs etc.
 4. Power-point presentation
 5. Online Material
 6. Additional material
- How often should the group meet
- The time scale of the course

- The Venue
- General administration (i.e. tea/coffee, register of attendees, subs collection, Xeroxing etc.)
- The number and identification of Group Conveners and their roles
 1. Writing the current programme as a result of regular group planning sessions
 2. Contact with the local U3A Website, Newsletter, Group Coordinators
 3. Programme management – demonstrations, visits, etc.
 4. Keeping and Submitting attendance records
 5. Tea/Coffee arrangements
 6. Equipment Booking and set up
 7. Administration of attendees, collecting subscription, keeping records of registered members
 8. Programme delivery/lead each session
- The Start Date
- Any Other business

This sample agenda is taken from a U3A book and is a recommendation for the start-up and review of Interest Groups.

It is expected that the Group Coordinator should be informed that this has taken place (either review or start-up) and this is reported to the committee at the first meeting after the membership renewal date. For help with the meeting see the Group Coordinator or a Committee member.

THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GROUP CONVENORS

The areas and roles of the Group Convenors are determined at the set-up of the Interest Group and are recorded at that time or any changes at a subsequent review meeting. This record is in the keeping of the group and of the branch Group Coordinator.

As we have said the roles depend upon the Interest Group but some can be identified here (and those we have missed you'll surely pardon):

1. Accidents dealing with, registering, or taking steps to avoid ([See: Health and Safety - accidents](#))
2. Acquisition of equipment ([Contact the Treasurer](#))
3. Attendance at group convenors meetings
4. Attendance sheets ([See: Attendance Sheets](#))
5. Being aware of any medical conditions ([See: Members Wellbeing](#))
6. Booking responsibilities of venues ([See: Booking and Cancelling Accommodation](#))
7. Booking visits/transport
8. Cancelling sessions, venues, trips etc. responsibilities ([See: Booking and Cancelling Accommodation](#))
9. Ensuring the Group annual review takes place ([See the Group Coordinator or Secretary](#))
10. Finding a venue/finding a new one ([See the Group Coordinator or a committee member](#))
11. Group members' contact details ([See: Attendance Sheets](#))
12. Helping with mobility issues ([See: Helping with Disabilities](#))
13. Helping with Hearing difficulties ([See: Helping with Disabilities](#))
14. Helping with Sight problems ([See: Helping with Disabilities](#))
15. Insurance issues ([See: Insurance](#))
16. Keeping a contact sheet in the event of accidents ([See: Members Wellbeing](#))
17. Keeping the committee informed of any problems, changes etc. via Group Coordinator
18. Preparing constitution and informing the Group Co-Ordinator of any changes ([See the Group Coordinator, Chairman or Secretary](#))
19. Refreshment
20. Risk assessments ([See: Health and Safety – Risk assessments](#))
21. Setting out of equipment
22. Storing of equipment
23. Subscription remittances to the Treasurer ([See: Finance](#))
24. Transmission of information to local U3A Website, Newsletter etc. ([See Below: Web Page and Newsletter responsibility](#))
25. Venue information ([See: Attendance Sheets](#))
26. Group numbers ([See: Group membership Numbers](#))

27. Change of group convenors ([See: Changing Group Convenors](#))

28. Closing down a group ([See: Closing Down a Group](#))

The list looks daunting but most is not relevant to every group and others just need a consideration and can be done quickly without any real work. However it is essential that the issues are considered. By spreading the work load the duties are not onerous at all and if everyone does their bit, the administration is reduced, the work load of running of the U3A reduces, the organisation becomes efficient, and all of the efforts do not fall onto the shoulder of a few which causes unhappiness, followed by disinterest, and finally withdrawal from the organisation.

The items in brackets following a role above refer to a heading in this document.

LIAISON BETWEEN GROUP CONVENOR AND U3A COMMITTEE

There are two primary links between the committee and the interest groups. The first is a day-to-day (or week-to-week, or month-to-month as necessary) link with the Group Co-Ordinator. The second link is the meeting of all group coordinators, held twice or three times a year. These two links ensures that no group is left isolated for any length of time.

It is the duty on the group convenor responsible for this role to ensure that the link is made and maintained.

GROUP CONVENOR AND GROUP CONVENOR MEETINGS

It is incumbent on the group convenors to ensure that there is no loss of contact between the committee and their group and if they cannot attend a group convenors meeting a substitute is appointed.

Notification of the meeting and an agenda will be distributed to all group convenors. Attendees are required to bring information and data as requested in the notification to the meeting so that efficient use of time can be made and the necessary decisions made.

A group report should be submitted before the meeting to the Secretary – this will be short and take the form of tick boxes and one word responses. No arduousness at all is envisaged.

The agenda of the meeting will identify any decisions to be made. Any issues that any group convenors feel needs to be discussed should be advised to the Secretary of the meeting as soon as possible and prior to the meeting where it will be added to the agenda.

BNB U3A WEB PAGE AND NEWSLETTER RESPONSIBILITY

In conjunction with the Newsletter and Web Site Officer and Publicity Officer, it is encouraged that information on the interest group be transmitted for either internal or external publication depending upon its nature. The group constitution and the meeting and venue details are a minimum for the Newsletter and Web Site Officer but extra information is encouraged. This extra could be visit reports, achievements, progress, speaker reports, future events and anything else that might increase the membership and enjoyment of group members via the web page or be suitable for external publication. The Group Coordinator's role in this area is important and it falls to them to ensure that this activity is undertaken and the web site submission as a minimum is supplied and is routinely updated.

GROUP CONSTITUTION

A group constitution is a statement, written by the group, on the purpose of the group. It identifies the syllabus, aims or *raison d'être* of the group and defines the nature of the study or activity and any teaching, visits, or speakers that the group is likely to use. It should be enough for any prospective member to decide if they want to join. It is the statement used on the web page and in documents used to display the activities of the branch.

The constitution is used to maintain the group and to identify changes for the annual review. It also helps during group convenor meetings eliminating the need to waste time explaining to others what they do and how they do it.

It is the responsibility of the Group Coordinator to ensure that this is done and maintained.