

u3a Bromley Group Leaders – Guidance for new Group Leaders and for those Leaders wanting a refresher

Thank you for volunteering to lead a u3a Bromley Group. This is a document to guide you through those early days.

1. Guidance Purpose

To provide advice and support to u3a Bromley Group Leaders, particularly newer Leaders. You can also refer to the Third Age Trust guidance and our u3a Bromley specific documents (see u3a Bromley Website).

2. Introduction

It is often said that interest groups are the life blood of the u3a and each group will develop its own structure. However, it is important that your group follows the u3a ethos of shared, participative and self-help learning - 'The teachers learn, and the learners teach.' The result then will be not only an increase in knowledge, but a supportive and friendly atmosphere which enables everyone to participate.

If you need some early practical advice, please contact one of our Group Liaison Officers – Carole Blacher, Peter Browne, Mary Garside, or Celia Thompson. They will be pleased to help you. You will be allocated to one of them as your Group gets underway. If you need to hire a room, Pat Apps will advise on locations and prices.

3. A reminder of the three u3a principles

Third Age

- Membership of a u3a is open to everyone no longer involved in full time work.
- Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a u3a.
- Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a u3a can do so.

Self-Help Learning

- Members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire.
- Learning is by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards.
- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers. They are all u3a members.

Mutual Aid

- Each u3a is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent but a member of the Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the u3a movement principles.
- No payments are made to members for services to any u3a.
- Each u3a is self-funded with membership subscriptions kept as low as possible.
- Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the u3a.

4. Forming a new group

- Consider what the aims of the group are – what are you hoping to learn/achieve/share by offering the group?
- Agree the development of your group with the Group Liaison Officer (GLO)/u3a Bromley Committee.
- Consider what interest there might be in the subject perhaps by some informal soundings.
- Is there an existing Subject Adviser who can support with ideas for the development of the group? A list of u3a Subject advisers is available on the u3a Bromley website, under the Third Age Trust Convenors/Leaders Handbook etc and on the u3a website.
- Liaise with the Treasurer and GLO about how you will report income and expenditure.
- Generate interest in attendance by promoting the group through as many different methods as possible, e.g. a flyer/poster, talking to existing groups, arranging for an email to members, posting on the u3a Bromley Website, an article in the u3a Bromley Newsletter, etc. The more methods you use, the more successful you are likely to be.
- You may need to undertake a risk assessment for the group. If something could go wrong as a result of the activities and cause injury, if someone might be prevented from accessing the Group, etc speak to your GLO. There is a template you can use.
- Identify what you want to achieve from your first meeting.
- Organise that first meeting, including invitations.

5. The first meeting

Recommended steps to take at the first meeting:

- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the group as you see it.
- Create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere and invite group members to introduce themselves.
- Ask about people's skills.
- Agree the tasks for running the group and who is willing to support these – e.g. the programme, keeping the register, collecting money, group reports etc.
- Agree, if relevant, if the group is aimed at – beginners, improvers, advanced.
- Agree how the group will work – discussion, instruction, presentation etc.
- Agree when and where the group will run.

- Identify any accessibility needs that group members may have. Refer to the u3a Bromley website for advice and guidance.
- Agree the costs for running the group (hall hire) and what members will pay. We will supply a credit card reader to help eliminate cash handling if you wish.
- Discuss how group members will communicate with each other bearing in mind data protection. Beacon is the preferred method for Group Leaders to share information. Consider too a What's App group to share information informally among members.
- Agree some ground rules e.g.
 - Be punctual
 - Listen to each other
 - Allow others to speak
 - Let someone know if you are unable to come
 - Agree to disagree amicably and be respectful to other group members
 - Every contribution matters
 - Have patience with and encourage those who are slower to learn
- Agree the focus for the next meeting and who is leading.
- Feedback what was agreed at the first meeting to your GLO.

Finally some thoughts

i) How people learn

'Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.' Benjamin Franklin

'Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try'. Anon

The value of the u3a style of learning is that everyone can contribute and by doing so will gain a feeling of self-worth and integration. We all learn in different ways. Variation in content, method and style can make the learning experience more vibrant and appealing.

ii) Other ways to deliver content:

A visiting speaker: A one-off visiting paid speaker, non-paid tutor or someone from another interest group or u3a.

Group member presentations: A short presentation by a member of the group or a member leading the meeting on a specific topic.

Discussion groups: Some activities will lead to discussion e.g. 'What the papers say', 'Which way does water go down the plug hole – and why?'

Project based: A project chosen by the members. Each person (or pair) allocated an area of research which they bring to the group. This can be a good way to learn new technology.

Practical work: This might lean towards specific subjects such as science, craft, photography, creative writing, storytelling.

Drama: Create a short sketch. Provide some entertainment for your monthly meeting.

Themes: Have an event or presentation linked to a specific topic.

Consult with a school or community group: E.g. local history presentation, art exhibition, debate.

Consult with other organisations: Museums, universities, libraries. Very useful for Shared Learning Projects.

Shared Learning Projects: These are opportunities to work on short term projects with other u3as or outside organisations. They usually involve research and have a definite outcome.

Study days and workshops: Plan one for your own members or as part of a local network. E.g. Family History Day, Language day, Story-telling workshop, debate, quiz, music.

Online learning beyond u3a: MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses), YouTube 'How to' videos, Future Learn.

6. Help and support

Please see the Section in the u3a Handbook for Group Convenors Leaders last updated in December 2025 for signposts to resources, Third Age Trust Workshops, Sharing information, Policies, Copyright, etc.

Please also see the u3a Bromley Website for our Constitution and other policies you need to know about.

February 2026