

Allocating places in Groups

Introduction: why are some groups oversubscribed?

Some of our groups are oversubscribed, particularly those which have to be kept fairly small such as language classes or fitness sessions. The maximum number of members for these smaller groups is often around 15, and there are over 1500 members of Farnham u3a.

If there isn't a space for you in a group that you wish to join, there may be a waiting list that you can be added to. Alternatively, you may find that spaces are available in other (particularly larger) groups: have a look at the 'Groups With Places' document which you'll find on the website. And do think about coming along to events like quizzes or Cuppa and a Chat. Or you could also think about setting up a new group.

Guidelines on allocating places fairly in oversubscribed groups

These are the guidelines that we usually follow on how to allocate places as fairly as possible when groups are over-subscribed:

- **'First come first served'**, i.e. allocating places to those who reply first. This approach is usually used for trips, and for new groups if they are over-subscribed. On balance this is felt to be fairer and more practicable than drawing names out of a hat. There have been occasions when we've had well over 100 people wishing to join a group with 15 or fewer places. The first come first served principle is often applied to waiting lists too, meaning that when places become available, Group Leaders approach those who have been on the waiting list the longest, first. If those members don't respond within a reasonable period of time, or say they're no longer interested, the place will be offered to the next member on the waiting list.
- **'Three strikes and you're out'**. Groups which are over-subscribed may apply this principle, contacting anyone who doesn't turn up for three sessions in a row to let them know that that their place in the group may be reallocated to someone else if there's a waiting list. However, we would suggest using this as a rule of thumb and checking the specific circumstances with people as part of the process. Whilst some members who've been attending infrequently may be quite happy for their place to be reallocated, in other cases there may be a health or personal reason why someone has not been able to attend which means it's fair to let them keep their place.
- **'One place per person'**. Where we have multiple groups offering the same activity, and they are over-subscribed, we feel people shouldn't take up more than one place (for example, joining both table tennis groups).

Waiting lists

It's straightforward to create a waiting list for a group in Beacon, and this is covered in the guide on [How to use Beacon](#). Group Leaders or Contacts are asked to add people to the waiting list on Beacon (rather than keeping details outside the system) in order to:

- Keep track of the level of interest in their group, and ensure other people can find this information on their behalf if you are indisposed
- Enable others such as the Committee to see how many people are waiting for places across our 130+ groups
- Ensure they have access to people's latest contact details when going back to them

- Avoid creating stores of members' personal data outside of Beacon, as this increases the risk of us breaching GDPR.

Waiting lists and non-members

People sometimes contact Group Leaders to check if there are spaces in a particular group before they join, but it's important to note that non-members can't be added to waiting lists in Beacon, so people do need to join u3a first in order to be put on a waiting list. People whose membership has lapsed will appear in red on Beacon and should be removed from waiting lists.

Tips on managing numbers in groups that are very popular

Group Leaders and Contacts have shared some tips on how they manage numbers in popular groups:

- Very few people come to each meeting, due to holidays, other commitments, sickness etc. If you keep a record of how often the people in your group actually attend, you might find that typical attendance rates are not 100%. 70-75% can be more typical as an attendance rate. This means that even if your group needs to be kept fairly small you can probably allow some extra people to join, as they won't all come each time.
- Lots of people tend to enrol for more groups than they can find time to attend, so you may well find numbers drop off naturally after the first few meetings, allowing you to invite some of those on the waiting list. If you notice that people are only attending sporadically, it's a good idea to contact them and ask if they really wish to continue. They might be quite happy to give their place to someone on the waiting list.
- At the end of the year, it's important (and fair) to ask people in the group to confirm whether they want to be a member again next year, rather than rolling everyone forward automatically – especially any who haven't attended regularly. This helps to free up spaces for new people who might want to join, particularly after the Open Morning, when any available spaces should be made open to all those who have paid their membership for the new year.
- At the start of the year (i.e. in September) check that everyone in your group has renewed their membership. If anyone has not renewed, their name will appear in red in Beacon which makes them easy to spot. Non-members are only allowed attend groups for a one-off taster session.

What if a group is under-subscribed and doesn't have enough members?

If you need some help finding more members for your group, please contact the Groups Team on groups@farnhamu3a.org.uk for a chat. In addition to publicising all groups on the website and at the annual Open Morning, there are a number of things we can do to publicise new or existing groups, including:

- Promoting the group in 'Groups With Places'.
- Putting information or a poster about the group on the u3a noticeboard in the Maltings
- Sending round an email to members
- Putting information about the group in eNews.

If a group doesn't have enough members, over time we might need to think about closing it down, not least to make sure membership fees are being put to best use when it comes to paying for room hire etc. Any such decisions would be made in discussion with the Group Leader, after considering all the alternatives.

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