

Setting up New Groups

Ideas for new groups

If you're interested in setting up a new group, the first step is to get in touch with the Groups Team on groups@farnhamu3a.org.uk and talk through things like:

- **The purpose and focus of the group.** It will need to fit with the [Principles of the u3a Movement](#), and add value and interest to our current Programme.
- **Who will organise the group.** Some groups are self-led (e.g. discussion forums) but still need someone to be responsible for the group administration. You could create a Group Contact, whose role is to handle communications and logistics, rather than a Group Leader. A group can have both a Group Leader and a Group Contact, and this can be a good way of sharing the work. You can also have more than one person involved in either or both of those roles. Some groups may decide to engage the services of professional tutors: please read our [External Tutors Policy](#) if you think this might be relevant. Please also think about whether extra work would be required from other volunteers in setting up or running the group: for example the Treasurer might need to be involved in handling any additional payments to be collected from members.
- **The frequency of group meetings.** Typically, groups meet monthly, fortnightly or weekly, but you could also consider one-off workshops or taster events, particularly to start with while you gauge the level of interest.
- **The likely level of interest and ideal size of the group,** including how to go about establishing how many people are interested (and how to allocate places fairly if there aren't enough spaces for everyone who'd like to join).
- **Any costs** that would need to be covered by u3a or by the members involved. Our current policy is for reasonable room or court hire fees to be covered by u3a out of general membership fees, though in some cases the members of the group could be asked to contribute towards higher levels of cost. Bear in mind that the Maltings offer us discounted rates on normal room hire for around 90 of our groups each year, and that we almost always have 90 groups using the Maltings – so it may not be possible for new groups to be allocated one of these 'slots'. Around 40 of our groups meet at other venues round Farnham, which provide a great range of facilities.

Deciding which ideas to take forward

Decisions about setting up new Groups generally need to be approved by the Committee on behalf of all members, taking into account:

- The **fit** with u3a principles and our constitution
- How the group will complement the current **programme**
- The likely level of sustained **interest** among members (and how this has been tested)
- **Cost** considerations, including affordability and fairness when it comes to allocating funds from the membership fees paid by all members
- Any **risk** or long-term commitments that might be involved, including any contractual considerations.

The Groups Team will agree with the Committee in each case whether an outline of the proposed new group should be brought to a monthly Committee meeting for discussion, or whether the

decision can be delegated to the Groups Team within pre-agreed parameters without going to a full Committee meeting.

Setting up a new group and finding members

If it's decided to go ahead with the new group, then the Groups Team will work with you to:

- Decide on a suitable **venue**, agree **dates and times** for meetings and book rooms (this is normally done by the Groups Team on the basis of information from the new Group Leader, in conjunction with the Programme Manager).
- Write up a **description** of the group, to go in the Programme, and on the website and notice board etc.
- Set the Group Leader or Contact up on **Beacon** (the u3a database). The group will be allocated a generic email address, such as lohist@farnhamu3a.org.uk for Local History. This avoids listing the personal email addresses of organisers on the website. Emails sent to the group address will be forwarded automatically to whichever email address/es you want to nominate. Telephone numbers will not be published.
- Make **information** about the new group available to members, so that they can get in touch with you and sign up for the new group. This might include publicising the group at our Open Morning, sending an email round to members, putting something on the noticeboard or in eNews, or flagging it in Groups With Places.

What if the group is over- or under-subscribed?

There is a document on the website which sets out some guidelines around Allocating Spaces in Groups, including what to do if a group is over- or under-subscribed. It's important to note that if a group doesn't have enough members over time, we might need to review the situation and potentially 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.

This document is owned by:	The Groups Team
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