

## Starting a group - it's really not difficult

Being u3a group leader need not be very challenging or even very time-consuming. In fact, even starting a group from scratch is not very difficult and you can get a lot of help from the Groups Team - let us go through a few examples and see what is involved.

### 1. I'd like to practise my Swedish and there is no group

Contact the groups team at a Coffee Morning, or a Monthly meeting or by emailing us at [groups@chichesteru3a.org.uk](mailto:groups@chichesteru3a.org.uk). One of the team members will email/ring you to talk you through how the Groups Team could help, and, in this case, we would suggest that we advertise for interest in the Bulletin. If no one responds to the advert, sadly we could not form a group.

Let us assume that we get several responses. We would then liaise with you and advertise again in the Bulletin that there would be a break-out meeting at a specified Coffee Morning, where all interested parties could get together and talk about forming a group. The advert would also invite members who were interested but couldn't come to that particular Coffee Morning to let the Groups Team know so they could be included in any subsequent emails.

At the breakout meeting, which could be chaired by a member of the Groups Team, if required, the attendees would discuss meeting venue / frequency / day / time - say, at members houses or a paid-for venue, weekly or monthly, or on the second and fourth Friday from 2 -4, say. They would also discuss what would happen at the meetings - is the meeting entirely free format chat in Swedish, do they want to select an article from a Swedish magazine to be read and then discussed at next month's meeting, do they want to search for and then use some written text book or an audio book and so on.

We run a number of foreign language conversation groups so will be able to put you in touch with their group leaders who can tell you about the way they run their meetings and what sort of material they use. The Third Age Trust, the central office for all local u3as, also has a 'subject adviser' for many different types of groups, who can provide advice. If the group decides on a paid-for venue, the groups team can advise on local church halls and meeting rooms that other groups use, and put you in touch with a group leader who uses the venue.

And, importantly, the break-out meeting would need to select one or maybe two joint group leaders /group admin people, from within their number who are willing to at least get the group off the ground. Group leaders duties are not onerous and the groups team are there to advise. Group leaders do not need to be the best Swedish speakers, as their function is largely administrative. For example, they may need to arrange a rota of members houses that will be used or may need to visit and decide on an appropriate venue. If a venue is used, currently average costs are about £2 per member per meeting. Many groups arrange their meetings in 'terms' of say 10 weeks and ask all members to pay say £20 in advance per term via the website PayU3A mechanism, so that the invoice from the venue can be paid by the Treasurer, as required.

Group leaders also need to keep a register of which members attend the meetings, and maintain a member list for their group on Beacon, which is the u3a's admin system. Quite often groups have two co-leaders, which eases the problem of occasional absence, and also means that people who are not at ease with IT can have an 'IT buddy' to handle that side of things. We can provide tuition over the phone on the use of Beacon.

Once the group is established we will collect the relevant information from you via a form and set up a webpage on the Chichester u3a website 'advertising' the Swedish Conversation group.

## 2. I'd like to join a book group, but none of them has vacancies

Again, contact the Groups Team. In this case we have another option, as we already have several book groups, and we can probably use the expertise of one of their members to help a new group to get established. This is known as a helicopter group leader, and has proved very successful.

So we would follow a similar course of action to that described above, although an advert for interest would probably not be necessary and we could go straight to the advert for the Coffee Morning break-out group. However, the groups team might offer to find an experienced book group member, who is willing to attend the break-out meeting at the Coffee Morning and the first few meetings of the group, and even run the first few meetings, if that is what is required. Then, after say four meetings, once the new group has been established and is running well, the group would nominate someone from within the group to take over and the 'helicopter group leader' could leave the group on its own.

## 3. I'd like to form a 5 a side indoor football group

Again, contact the Groups team. In this case, there are appropriate facilities at Westgate Leisure Centre and we already run a Keep Fit group, 2 Table Tennis groups and a Badminton group at the Westgate Centre, whose staff are very helpful.

We would follow a similar course of action to that described above, but we could put you in touch with the Group Leader of one of the groups who use the Centre who could meet you at the Westgate Centre, show you around and introduce you to the right members of staff there.

So, being a group leader need not be onerous. You do not necessarily need to be an expert in the subject. Many groups have more than one leader to spread the load, cope with occasional absence or whatever. The Groups Team can provide advice and put you in touch with other group leaders whose group is interested in a similar topic or meets at a venue you might use.