

## Participation in groups

### Introduction

This document is aimed primarily at people who are new to U3A and specifically to being a member of one or more of the groups. Much of the advice given here is self-evident and most of it is simply common sense – but not all of it.

You may want to join a group for company, to enjoy a sport/pastime or to learn the basics of a skill or subject that is new to you. If you want to get the most out of being a group member though you'll need to do more than simply turn up.

Whilst it is down to the Organiser of the group to arrange each session and its content they might need or want help. That might simply take the form of setting up a room, putting chairs & tables away or it might mean doing some advance preparation (thinking, reading etc.). The Group Organiser is a volunteer and there are many ways in which you can help make their job easier.

Not everyone is used to learning or discussions in groups. A few people, unintentionally and without being aware, can be disruptive or overbearing. A few others might appear to be withdrawn and uninvolved whilst occasionally others seem to have a different agenda to everybody else. We're all different and we have differing behaviours when interacting with people. That's something which can make being part of a group very rewarding. Very occasionally it can lead to stress and a lack of enjoyment.

Having read this you'll be able to contribute positively to your groups and, together with the other participants, get much more enjoyment from them.

### What makes a good U3A group member?

- Arriving on time for meetings where possible. That means arriving by the time set by the Organiser, which may be several minutes before the official start. This allows the Organiser to set up tables, equipment etc. that might depend on the number of attendees
- Responding in a timely fashion to communications from the Organiser and legitimate communications from other members. If the Organiser requests confirmation of attendance (or absence) for each meeting, you should always respond – whether you're able to attend or not. If you're going to be away for a given meeting and you know in advance, try to let the Organiser know
- Looking for ways to help or support the Organiser. Might he/she need help setting up for each meeting? If he/she will be away for a session, someone will need to stand in. Could that be you?

- Being nice to other group members. Try and take an interest in your fellow members and give them help and support where possible.
- Welcoming new members. You were new to the group once and hopefully you got a good reception too.
- Being constructive and civil in your criticism if you disagree with how the Organiser runs some or all sessions. Put this to him/her privately. Consider how you might be able to help and consider offering to run the group yourself.
- Contributing where possible. Not all of us like to speak out but where a session is participative, try and add your tuppence-worth when appropriate.
- Behaving respectfully at all times. If you disagree with the way the Organiser is running a session or behaving, remember that they're a volunteer, giving up their time and putting at least some effort into running the session. If another member is 'hogging the floor' or behaving badly, support the Organiser in moderating their behaviour and remain reasonable at all times.

### What if I want to be more than just a group member?

You might be asked to help run a group – or even take over. You might want to start a group yourself because there isn't one catering for that subject or activity already. What do you do?

The first step is contact the Groups Coordinator. His/her details are on the monthly groups list. They will listen to your ideas and act as a 'sounding board'. If you want to know a bit more about what being a Group Organiser involves then he/she will happily meet up with you for a more detailed chat. You can also read the 'Guidelines for new Organisers' document available from the Groups Organiser or on the Exmouth and District U3A website.

### Feedback

We're all members of our U3A because we want to learn, have fun and generally enjoy ourselves. If there's something going on within a group that you don't like or are unhappy about, please let a committee member know.

There's no guarantee that we'll be able to fix the problem but we will listen and make changes and improvements where appropriate.

Exmouth and District U3A Committee

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