North London U3A

Guide for Group Coordinators

Thank you for agreeing to organise an interest group for NLU3A. Interest groups are at the heart of what members look for in a U3A and we depend on volunteers like you to keep them going.

What follows are a few guidelines to ensure interest groups continue to work smoothly and effectively.

Keeping up your enthusiasm

The most important thing is to keep up your enthusiasm for your group topic or activity and share it with other members of the group. So, keep enjoying what you do.

If you are running short of ideas on what to do in your group, you may like to be aware that the national movement has advisers who can come up with suggestions to help. See https://www.u3a.org.uk/learning/subjects for details.

Eligibility for membership of the group

Normally, groups should be open to all members of NLU3A.

The only exception is if your group activity requires a minimum skill level from its members (such as some language or games groups). If you think your group falls into this category, please let the Groups Organiser know at henanded@gmail.com so that we can investigate the possibility of setting up a beginners' group.

Groups may set a maximum size for themselves, because of space or other constraints. If you do, vacancies should be filled on a first come, first served basis.

In these circumstances, please keep a waiting list of all would-be members and share it with the Groups Organiser so we can investigate the possibility of setting up another parallel group.

Only members of NLU3A can belong to an NLU3A interest group. The only exception is our summer programme, where non-members can attend events as a taster.

Managing membership of the group

Each group needs a Group Coordinator, but this role can be shared between two or more people.

As well as organising the group activity, we ask Group Coordinators to manage some aspects of membership. These include:

- Before inviting new group members to their first meeting, or at that meeting, please check that new members belong to NLU3A. We no longer routinely issue membership cards, but members are emailed a pdf of their card which they can send you. If in doubt, please contact membership@nlu3a.org.uk for confirmation.
- Similarly, please do a check once a year that existing group members still belong to NLU3A after the annual renewal period, usually at the end of February. Around this time you will be asked by the Groups Organiser for a list of names of all your group members, which will then be checked against the Beacon database.
- Remember that a member of NLU3A can ask to attend one meeting of a group to try it out; after that, if they want to continue, they should be added to the list of group members. Potential new members of NLU3A can also attend one meeting as a trial; after that they should be asked to join NLU3A.
- We keep a central record on our electronic membership database (Beacon) of which groups members say they belong to when they renew their membership. Please keep your own list so the two can be checked against each other.
- Alternatively, as a Group Coordinator you can get access to Beacon, which will enable you to check membership and send emails to your group members. If you would like access, please contact the Groups Organiser. The system is fairly straightforward and you will be given training.
- Also, please keep a register of attendance at all meetings, so we can monitor how groups are getting on.
- If a member tells you they are leaving NLU3A it is very helpful if you can pass this on to membership@nlu3a.org.uk so the membership secretary doesn't waste time chasing them.

Communication with members of the group

Speedy and clear communication with all group members on planned activities and meetings is vital. This can be arranged through Beacon (see above).

Alternatively, if you use your own email as most Group Coordinators do, remember the need to protect members' privacy (this is required by legislation – the so-called GDPR regulations).

Unless you have the consent of the individual members, you **cannot share their email addresses with other members**. So, please either get the explicit consent of all group members to share their email addresses, or use the bcc (blind copy) facility

when sending emails to all the group so that other group members' email addresses are not visible to any recipient.

Please also remember that you cannot use email addresses given to NLU3A for non-NLU3A purposes.

If you wish to, you can set up a folder on the NLU3A Dropbox account, where documents can be stored for reference by group members. If you would like to set up a folder, please contact the manager of this facility, Steven Marston (steven.marston@mac.com)

Information for new or prospective members

Each group has a page on the NLU3A website where information about its activities, location and contact details of the Group Coordinator are provided. Please keep this under review and let the Groups Organiser know (at henanded@gmail.com) if any changes are needed.

Some Group Coordinators find it helpful to prepare a short introductory sheet to be given to new or prospective members, setting out the location, accessibility, forthcoming dates and activities.

Accessibility

It is often helpful for members interested in joining your group to know about accessibility. Please think about the following aspects so you can provide information on request:

- Does your venue have step-free access?
- If not, about how many steps are there to negotiate?
- What public transport is available to reach the venue?
- What is the parking situation nearby?

Please also pass on this information to the Groups Organiser. We can also add this information to your group's page on the website on request.

Costs of venues

Where possible, we encourage groups to meet in a convenient home, or in a commercial venue that does not charge beyond buying a coffee or drink (i.e. cafes or pubs).

However, where necessary NLU3A can pay for venue costs centrally up to a maximum of £40 per group member per year. You will need to agree this with the Groups Organiser team, who will make the arrangements and deal with the organisation hiring out the venue concerned.

For example, if there are 12 members in your group, the total annual venue cost for your group must not exceed 12 x £40 = £480.

If your venue costs come to more than that, the Group Organiser team will discuss with you how to reduce the cost per head, e.g. by recruiting more members, changing venue or reducing the frequency of meetings.

External venues will only be paid for during the term times, which are published each year, or as agreed for one-off events such as the Summer Programme.

Other costs

Where groups incur charges from external sources, e.g. paid teachers, accompanists or models, or charges are incurred whilst arranging outings, the income and expenditure should be handled through the Treasurer (treasurer@nlu3a.org.uk). Alternatively, if you handle these monies yourself, please keep a note of all income and expenditure and notify this to the Treasurer afterwards.

This requirement does not apply to small incidental costs (e.g. tea and biscuits).

Health and safety

Every NLU3A member is responsible for taking care of their own health and safety and that of any other person who may be affected by their actions or omissions. All members are expected to do everything possible to prevent hazards and injury to themselves and others.

Before taking part in any activity, it is the responsibility of every member to decide whether they have the fitness and competence to do so safely.

Group Coordinators should take all reasonable precautions to ensure the health and safety of their group members. Common sense should be applied.

If you are using a paid venue, do obtain a copy of their risk assessment from them or the Groups Organiser team and make sure that your group adheres to the required actions.

Similarly, if you use a paid or professional instructor in activities involving movement, make yourself aware of the instructor's risk assessment and make sure your group adheres to the requirements.

You should also give your group members and prospective members enough information about planned activities so that they can assess their suitability for them. For example, if you are organising a walk, please try to provide members with an approximate distance and duration, whether there is any steep/uneven ground or fights of steps, and if any cafés/toilets and rest points are likely to be available.

If an incident or accident does occur, you should ensure that appropriate action is taken to assist the member or members affected. This may include telephoning 111 for medical advice (or 999 if the incident is serious or life-threatening).

You should inform the Chair of NLU3A of any accident or incident as soon as appropriate, who will ensure that those who witnessed the event and were involved complete an incident report for the insurers.

Retaining and protecting emergency contact numbers

As a Group Coordinator, you may wish to ask the members of your group to provide you with a contact number for someone who can be contacted in any emergency involving the member. Whether you do this may depend on the nature of your group's activities: for example, we would recommend holding emergency contact numbers if your group is involved in physical activities, as these may be useful in case of accidents. However, it is each member's choice whether or not they provide an emergency number. If members have provided you with these numbers, you must hold them securely and use them only in an emergency. If a member leaves your group, then you should delete your record of the number they provided.

Members are also asked to supply emergency numbers to the Membership Secretary as part of the joining or renewal process, and these emergency contact numbers are held on the Beacon database.

Problems or questions

If any problems arise or you have any questions on this guidance or any other issues, please contact the Groups Organiser at henanded@gmail.com

NLU3A Committee

March 2025