

Group Coordinators Workshop April 2016 – Answering the Challenges of Group Leadership, (or – you are not alone!)

Workshop participants were requested to debate eight challenges that may be faced by Groups and Group Coordinators, and provide advice and solutions.

Note. Much advice is currently available on the Group Coordinators Pages of our website in [Important Documents for Coordinators](#), in particular please see; [Problem Resolution Guidelines](#), and associated documents. It is also possible for all Groups to make use of a “trial period” for new members to gauge capability and commitment – however, remember, that at heart we are an inclusive organisation. Resolving issues within a Group does emphasise how important it is to have a deputy Group Coordinator for support and initial discussion.

Question 1. A learning group has two members who only attend once every couple of months which is adversely affecting the group and its progress.

Not attending slows the progress of the whole group, thus it should be clearly stated when a new member joins a group, as to what the level of expected commitment is, especially the minimum commitment. For some subjects, such as languages, it may be possible to email lesson content between meetings. It is important that the Group Coordinator has the support of the majority of the members of the group in whatever actions are taken, thus issues should be discussed by the Group. A member suggested they could be sent to the back of the waiting list if they miss two meetings

Question 2. A group has a member who attempts to dominate sessions and is generally lacking in respect for whoever is leading the group. Same group members are upset but not inclined to speak out.

Try and recognise and act early before the problem reaches “confrontation” time. Approach the member with candour and openness, describing the behaviour and how it is affecting others. Group Coordinator deputies should be involved to support the Coordinator. Encourage the group as a whole to be more active.

Question 3. A learning group has been meeting for several years, and has inevitably lost members, it is apparent that in a year or so the group may be forced to close – how can such a group introduce new members whilst maintaining the interest of current members.

Recruit members with some level of skill or knowledge of the subject. Offer short, intensive “getting up to speed” or introductory courses. Run a parallel, beginners group for a short period then merge with the existing group. New members could be assisted / mentored by existing and experienced members. Consider splitting the group for parts of the meeting, coming together as one group at the beginning and end until new members are more capable.

Question 4. A group has two members who due to health and age related issues are “holding back” the group which is causing discontent with some members.

Usually only an issue with activity groups and may be self-resolving as members realise their situation, however, remember, we are an inclusive organisation. Activity groups may wish to include social only events in their programmes or initiate friendship groups which are for socialising, chat and coffee rather than the activity. Our activity groups vary in how strenuously (seriously?) they undertake the activity, thus moving to another group may be a solution.

Question 5. A Group Coordinator is finding that although there are often 10 people attending, the number who attends on a regular basis is too small for the group to prosper.

Discuss with each member why attendance is erratic; consider altering the meeting time or frequency. Maintain a waiting list and introduce new members from this. If a subscription is required, e.g. for facility rental, ensure that all members are aware that the full subscription must be paid irrespective of attendance.

Question 6. A Group Coordinator is doing all the planning, setting up for meetings, preparation and organisation – how to spread the workload?

Ensure there is a deputy! Ensure all members realise that the U3A is a mutual-help organisation and everybody is required to take part in administration, planning, setting up meeting etc. If you do not feel able to raise this with the individual members, have a group discussion about future planning and responsibilities, making clear that membership come with responsibilities.

Question 7. A Group Coordinator is no longer coping with the role – what are the signs and what can be done to ensure the group is sustainable and prospers.

Signs are; reduced programme, less interesting programme, reduced or no planning. Individuals in the group need to offer their support and there is an onus on the deputy to act – initially be discussing with other members. Approach compassionately and if the existing Group Coordinator wishes to maintain a reduced role there should be a gradual transfer to the new Group Coordinator.

Question 8. A Group Coordinator would like a deputy to share the workload and eventually take over the role of coordinator – what steps should the GC take?

Every Group should have a deputy Group Coordinator. The existing GC should tell the deputy and the group as a whole that they wish to step down from the role and openly discuss the transfer of responsibilities. Deputy's names and contact details should be recorded in the database, so please tell your General Coordinator of any changes with deputies. Have a clear role for the deputy.

If any issue arises within your group that concerns you, do not hesitate to contact your General Coordinator – there is always is a solution.