

KEEPING IN TOUCH IN OUR U3A

We have been talking with U3As and many members across the U3A community about the creative ways older adults can use to stay healthy, active and connected with each other. Social distancing does not mean we can't carry on being social and so below are just some of the great ideas and suggestions U3As have shared with us about keeping in touch with each other.

For those without internet access

Phoning each other

Set up a phone tree so that each member of a group could be responsible for calling two others at least once a week [this will be particularly important for members not on the internet]. Rotate who phones who. Make a phone-call once a week – to a U3A friend - especially someone on their own – just for a chat. The social interaction is such an important part of our informal learning ethos. Let other members know if you would like to keep in regular contact with other members.

Share your phone number (and/or email address) with other group members if you are happy to do so (many of you will be on weekly bcc/blind copy lists).

Telephone conferencing

Why not consider using free conference call software – such as WhyPay which facilitates three or more people speaking on the phone together at once? Find out more at <https://whypay.net/>
This will be particularly important for people who don't have internet access or aren't confident using it.

Letters

Reinitiate letter writing either to continue giving opinions as part of interest groups or as a pen pal type initiative to ensure people without internet access do not feel isolated. Write letters to your U3A friends – the ones you may see regularly and maybe those that you only see at monthly meetings or AGMs and are definitely due an update.

Local newsletters

Continue to produce and send out newsletters, both within U3As and also within interest groups if possible. Members should be encouraged to keep sending articles and letters in and on issues with less content the newsletters can still be filled with local news. Postal newsletters are going to be particularly important for people not on the internet.

NB. Some members will be able to use these systems with help. U3As could consider establishing a digitally skilled group which members can contact with specific technical queries or identifying members within each of the interest groups who can help others in this way.

For those with internet access

National newsletter

Ask committees to encourage as many members as possible who use email to sign up directly to the national newsletter. This is filled with information, stories and advice and continues to be a two way conversation between the whole U3A movement. It will keep people in touch with U3A and hopefully make us all feel part of the U3A community. You can sign up <https://www.u3a.org.uk/newsletter>

Individual U3A websites

Ensure yours is up to date with details of the 'virtual groups' that are happening and copies of your newsletters available. Please include a link to the Trust Newsletter (see above) which will include the latest updates on the coronavirus situation. Include links to any U3A Twitter accounts and if your U3A doesn't have one then consider setting one up. Any member can also set up their own Twitter account and Tweet and interact with other members.

Utilise Subject Advice

The Trust has a number of Subject Advisers who advise on setting up and running interest groups on a wide range of subjects. All have provided information on their subject areas and links to resources at <https://www.u3a.org.uk/resources/subjects>

Utilise the expertise of your members

Do you have a computer group or people with computer skills that are willing to help other members to get digitally connected? Could you identify a “digital support team” to provide help getting people online and to Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp and also standard communications tools like email and texts?

Running groups remotely

Consider running groups via social media and other technology which will allow you to interact online, video or conference call with several members at once. This could include closed Facebook groups, Skype, teleconference tools like WhyPay to ‘meet’ with your members.

Group leaders could request examples of what people are doing and how they are getting on, to share with the group.

Set your group members research or other tasks to do shared out via email, so members can work on it at home and can contact the group leader by phone or email if they have any questions or problems with task itself. Keep activities going and take it in turns to suggest one.

Closed Facebook groups:

There is advice about how to set up a closed Facebook group at: <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Closed-Facebook-Group>. There is also advice about how you can keep safe on facebook: https://en-gb.facebook.com/help/122006714548814?helpref=popular_topics. These can be used for exchanging ideas, resources, sources of materials, keeping in touch and developing online initiatives to keep members involved.

WhatsApp:

One suggestion for groups or just within interest groups could be keeping in touch on a WhatsApp group. This is reliant on members of the group having a phone that supports WhatsApp but is free to use and enables users to stay in touch by text and allows them to share photos. You can also make free audio and video calls via WhatsApp. There is advice at: <https://www.wikihow.tech/Make-a-Call-on-WhatsApp>.

Other suggestions: Skype, WhyPay, Zoom, Microsoft Teams

Podcasts

Some U3As already offer these and we could encourage people to both try and develop their own and to listen to those already available.

Please note: We will give more advice about setting up the above in the coming days.

There are many more ideas and advice to come – so please keep checking these pages regularly. If you have additional ideas on how to manage and run interest groups during this period, please let us know and share your positive and successful stories.