

The Group Leaders and Really Useful Group Meeting March 2018

Tuesday 6th March found 80 of the Group Leaders and RUGs members of the Reigate and Redhill U3A at the Reigate Manor Hotel for tea and cakes. **Mike Cockett** as Chair welcomed everyone on behalf of the committee and thanked everyone for their hard work and commitment to making our U3A one of the most vibrant groups in Surrey. The meeting was an opportunity to gather views on a variety of topics and, in light of the increase in membership, it was also a chance for various members of the committee to update the leaders on issues relating to how Groups are organised, Finance, Data Protection and how the Beacon system can help manage groups more easily.

Jan Brown, the group co-ordinator was keen that leaders shared their best practice of how individual groups were run and how things could be improved. She explained her role of encouraging new groups and helping existing groups to run smoothly. She then asked those present to discuss 3 questions related to managing groups.

1. What makes a group work well?

Summary of responses: *There was a clear, consistent view of what makes a group work well summarised as follows: An interesting, relevant programme, all members contributing to the best of their capabilities, being responsible for delivering agreed contributions/activities, mutual respect, good communications all around the group including answering emails.*

2. Members behaving badly – Case study: *Occasionally members in a group do not ‘treat fellow members with respect and courtesy at all time’ (taken from the terms and conditions of membership). This could be through dismissing/critising the contributions of others, monopolising the discussions, not notifying the GL about absence etc*

Summary of responses: *Bad behaviour is clearly a rare occurrence and there were only two aspects mentioned - members who fail to inform the Group leader that they are unable to attend meetings and members who monopolise the group and dismiss the contributions of others.*

3. Attracting and maintaining new members – Case study: *The membership of a long-established group has shrunk and when new members join the group they rarely stay for more than three sessions.*

Summary of responses: *Several suggestions were made including ascertaining why the new members did not return, ensure a welcoming atmosphere within the group, reviewing the way that the group is working and seeking help*

John Hopkins, who manages Data Protection and the Beacon membership management system, explained how Beacon works and how the security of members data is assured. He encouraged Group Leaders to use Beacon to email members of their groups and to see the potential for managing their groups.

Hilary Loney asked those present to complete a survey about the format of the Christmas Tea Party held in December.

Alex Hunter, as Treasurer, explained that all groups are self-financing, and that Group Leaders have the responsibility to keep records of all expenditure apart from the refreshment contribution.

Colin Mitchell spoke about the role of the Really Useful Group and how vital the members are to the smooth running of our U3A. He was keen to enrol more members especially those who could help set out chairs and tables at Monthly Meetings. Requests for help with communication and data management were also made.

The whole afternoon was relaxed and allowed for information to flow freely between the different groups. Each table was encouraged to fill in questionnaires which would allow the committee to evaluate how the format of the meeting could be changed/improved.

Key messages for Group Leaders

1. Check on website on the accuracy of the information about your group and send Jan Brown any changes.
2. If you wish to publicise your group – at monthly meetings, new member meetings or in the email bulletin – please let Jan know.
3. For groups that meet away from members' houses, keep a register of those attending.
4. If new members have been invited but do not attend, please inform Jan.
5. Keep a record of all group expenditure apart from the contribution for refreshments. When hiring venues, please book in the name of Reigate and Redhill U3A and present the paid invoice to the Treasurer when claiming a rebate.
6. Contact John Hopkins if you would like to learn how to use the Beacon system to manage and communicate with your group securely.
7. A **Data Protection and Privacy Policy** is being written and new application/renewal forms devised to ensure that Reigate and Redhill U3A are compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (**GDPR**) that come into force on 25 May 2018. Once agreed, they will be found on the About Us section of the website rru3a.org.uk
8. Please ensure that, when sending emails from your own address, you hide the email addresses by using the Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) function. If you would like advice about this, please let Jan know. Further advice to Group leaders regarding **GDPR** will be circulated in due course.

Actions arising from suggestions at the meeting

1. Guidance for sharing car fuel costs was published in the May Newsletter.
2. A workshop for Group Leaders on using the Beacon system to manage groups to be run on the morning of Monday 11 June.
3. A workshop for new and perspective Group leaders to be run if there is interest from members.
4. The committee discussed the suggestion that instead of contributions towards tea/biscuits at group meetings going to the host of the meeting, money could be collected for charity. It was agreed that as Groups manage this aspect in a variety of ways and the host may decide to give the money to a charity personally. However, it would not be a donation from U3A.