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THE THIRD AGE TRUST



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

# Environmental

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# HOW TO START AN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES GROUP

## Introduction

By the time you ask for this leaflet you will probably have some broad idea of what you want to cover and how it might be organised. The following notes are some jottings about the ways other groups have been or are being run, some suggestions about where to get ideas and some useful contacts. You can decide at the outset the best way forward for you or let the group evolve as it progresses. The U3A Aims and Guiding Principles might be useful at this stage see [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

## Leading a group

There are many ways of leading a group. The main aim is to encourage the sharing of knowledge, skills, interests and experiences and with everyone in the group contributing as they desire and are able. Here are some of the ways in which other people have found appropriate for them. It is not necessary to have one fixed way: it can be a mix and match depending on your own and your group's preferences and situation. These suggestions are in no particular order.

1. 2 leaders sharing the tasks equally
2. Have a deputy leader to support and take over when necessary e.g. holidays, illness, etc.
3. Being the organiser/administrator of the group with others contributing the knowledge/expertise
4. Setting up the group as a self-help learning partnership
5. Running a short course of study on a particular subject say for a term or a year

## Getting Started

The first thing to do is to advertise as appropriate within your U3A that you would be interested in starting an Environmental Science Group and gather names, telephone numbers, and email if possible so that a meeting can be arranged where everyone interested can consider the options and what ways the group could function. Then at the first gathering of interested people democratically discuss how you would all like the group to be organised. See above.

Concurrently with this the subject matter is what brought you together so a discussion of the range of topics in the initial stages to ensure continued interest for the whole group. A list of ideas will help in subsequent planning of a programme. Details like who will do what, timing of sessions, where to meet, refreshments or not, etc is important to set the scene.

## What to do

This is very much up to you as leader and the members of your group to agree on. It can evolve as time goes on and the membership of the group changes and will

reflect interests, experiences and expertise. Once you have a list of ideas a programme can be worked out. This may be wide ranging to begin with and at a later date go back and study some of the topics in greater depth. To begin with keep it simple and let everyone know what is to happen and that each person's contribution is valued.

Here are some of the areas for study that others have found fruitful. It certainly is not an exhaustive list as the study within this subject area is as wide ranging as you care to make it. Anything connected with where we live, locally and globally is valid.

- Environmental Issues
- Global Warming
- Climate Change
- Recycling
- Air travel
- Pollution
  
- Natural History:
  - Botany – flowers, trees, mosses and lichens,
  - Gardening and allotments
  - Fauna – minibeasts, butterflies and moths,
  - Ecology what grows and lives where and why
  - Habitats e.g. chalk downlands, woodlands, tropical rainforests,
  - Endangered species
  - Evolution of species and changes to challenging conditions
  
- Geography is the ultimate environmental discipline:
  - Jurassic Coast
  - Coastlines
  - Erosion
  - Rivers, mountains
  - Ocean currents and marine life

Much of environmental study is interdisciplinary. These are some of the multitudinous links.

The history of an area determines what grows there. Mining and industry for instance can contribute minerals that affect the plants that grow and hence the animals that are there. Invasive plants and where they originate e.g. Oxford ragwort

Art in nature is a huge area, from detailed drawings and paintings of flora and fauna to works of art by famous artists such as Rousseau's tiger

Music related to bird song.

Physical activity – walking, gardening, cycling instead of going by car

Social Science – the effect of environmental changes on people, their health and well-being, economies and world trade

Science - All of environmental study can be classed as a science as it is a journey of discovery about the world, what is there, how it became, why it happens and the philosophy behind it.

Technology - which garden tools are best for purpose, what mulches to use.

Computers for recording and sharing data on butterfly, moth or bird sightings.

### **How to study environmental topics**

Getting the whole group involved is probably the best way educationally where each person contributes. Teaching something is the best way to learn and it is possible for everyone to do this with the right support and encouragement. But there are many other approaches such as:-

- Visits to outdoor locations
- Visiting experts giving talks
- Lectures
- Videos, slides, DVDs
- Museums, libraries, industries

### **Why are you studying**

Having a group project with a specific outcome maybe a nature trail leaflet around an area of interest or a presentation at a main meeting of the U3A.

Social gathering.

Personal interest in the subjects

Sharing of information with like-minded individuals

To feel you are doing something for the environment

This is not an exhaustive list and all are valid. There may indeed be a combination of motives for engaging in and/or leading the study group.

### **Environmental Studies Network**

This is open to all study group leaders and is a way of sharing experiences, information and expertise.

Newsletters are produced about 3 times a year by the Study group Coordinator containing contributions from members of the network. These are sent out by post or e mail.

The Study Group Network Coordinator will be very happy to receive communications from any of the groups either at the inception of the group or subsequently either via the Third Age Trust head office or directly – phone and e mail addresses on the website and in the U3A News.

## **Useful sources of information/Contacts**

*Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (R.S.P.B.),*  
The Lodge,  
Sandy,  
Bedfordshire.  
SG19 2DL  
Tel. 01767 680551  
Web site - [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

*Environment Agency*  
National Customer Contact Centre  
PO Box 544  
Rotherham  
S60 1BY  
Tel 08708 506 506 (Mon-Fri 8-6)  
Website - [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

*Woodland Trust,*  
The Woodland Trust,  
Autumn Park,  
Grantham,  
Lincolnshire.  
NG31 6LL  
Tel 01476 581111  
Website - [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)

*Friends of the Earth*  
56-58 Alma Street  
Luton,  
Bedfordshire.  
LU1 2YZ  
Tel 020 7490 1555  
Website - [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)

*The Wildlife Trusts,*  
The Kiln,  
Waterside,  
Mather Road, Newark,  
Notts. NG24 1WT  
Tel 01636 677711  
Website - [www.wildlifetrusts.org](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org)

*WWF-UK*  
Panda House  
Weyside Park  
Godalming  
Surrey GU7 1XR  
Tel : 01483 426444  
Website - [www.wwf.org.uk](http://www.wwf.org.uk)

*Natural England,*  
1 East Parade,  
Sheffield,  
S1 2ET

Tel: 0114 241 8920  
Website - [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

*Natural Environment Research Council,*  
Polaris House,  
North Star Avenue,  
Swindon,  
Wiltshire.  
SN2 1EU  
Tel 01793 411500  
Web site - [www.nerc.ac.uk](http://www.nerc.ac.uk)

*Field Studies Council (FSC),*  
Preston Montford,  
Montford Bridge,  
Shrewsbury,  
Shropshire.  
SY4 1HW  
Tel 01743 852140  
Website - [www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org)

Your local council may also be able to help you

## **Resources**

The U3A hold a number of non-book resources for you to borrow free of charge. You only need to pay the return postage. Contact Elizabeth Gibson at the Resource Centre in the national Office for a list of material.

I also have a small stock of my own personal material which you are welcome to borrow on the same basis.

Museums and libraries are a valuable source.

Increasingly the Internet provides a huge amount of material. Just go to a search engine and type in your requested topic.

Local experts are usually very willing to share their expertise with U3A groups. They may charge a small fee but many are prepared to do it for a small gratuity or travel expenses.