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THE THIRD AGE TRUST



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Science, Technology and Society

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Starting Up

There is no such thing as a ‘proper’ way to start a group: what works in one U3A could fail in another. However, wherever you are it is helpful to know where to go for information and material and what other U3A Study Groups do. With these needs in mind this leaflet is in two parts; the first lists some sources of information and material while the second consists of programme ideas from existing U3A groups with interests in science and similar subjects, e.g. groups such as History of Science, Technology, Science Explained, Science and Technology, Future of Science, Science for Everybody, etc.

What’s in a Name?

Science, Technology and Society is quite a mouthful but I have adopted it at the suggestion of a few group leaders for the whole grouping of science-related study groups across U3As. The name that a group in a particular U3A adopts should give a fair indication of its likely programme and will influence the type of member that it attracts. For example, one U3A adopted the name ‘Technology in the Home and Beyond’, another chose ‘Science and Society’ while a third opted for ‘Natural Philosophy’; there are several other variations.

Some sources of information and material.

Your U3A Region and Network. All U3As are members of a Region and yours may have established links between similar groups. The Group Coordinator on your U3A Committee should be able to put you in touch with any ‘science’ link. Many U3As are also members of local Networks of U3As and these are even more likely to have established links between U3As that your Group Coordinator should know about.

Other U3As. If your Region and Network are not able to help you can still look around your locality for other U3As with groups having similar interests to yours. Their ideas and programmes might give you a start for a programme of your own. If you don’t know where the U3As are contact the National Office or look at the National U3A websites (see below).

U3A National Office / Third Age Trust. The U3A National Office exists to help us and it does so in a friendly and informal way. Its address is:

The Old Municipal Building, 19 East Street, Bromley, Kent BR1 1QE. Tel. 020 8466 6139.

E-mail. national.office@u3a.org.uk

Regular Mailings to U3A Secretaries. The Business Secretary of every U3A receives regular mailings from the National Office. Their contents include information on National and Regional Summer Schools and Study Days together with much other information that can be invaluable to Group Leaders. Your U3A’s Business Secretary should be passing relevant material to Group Leaders (sometimes via Group Coordinators) – if yours is not

doing this then point out the error of their ways. The content of mailings can also be read in the members' area of the National U3A website.

U3A Signposts. U3A Signposts is a very helpful U3A Internet resource that shares information on a wide range of issues.

Find it at <http://worldu3a.org/signpost/>.

U3A National Website. The U3A National website is an underused resource giving you access to all kinds of material.

Find it at www.u3a.org.uk.

U3A Resource Centre. A free source of non-book material such as 35mm slides, video cassettes and DVDs related to the types of subject that U3As study. You may borrow material for free but must pay the postage for its return to the Centre. The Centre will be pleased to send you a catalogue of the material held for your choice of subject: The Resource Centre is co-located with the National Office. Telephone 020 8315 0199.

Third Age Matters. Published five times each year, this includes general U3A information, articles about U3As in the UK and useful addresses such as those for Subject Advisers, the U3A Resource Centre and National Office. Many U3As arrange for Third Age Matters to be posted to members' home addresses. If your U3A doesn't do this you should consider persuading your U3A committee to arrange for direct mailing.

Sources. A U3A educational bulletin published three times each year and included with Third Age Matters to U3As subscribing to direct mail (another good reason for making sure that your Third Age Matters is posted to you). This bulletin contains a wealth of material and ideas for all groups, not just Science and Technology. Contact National Office for a subscription form if you do not get Third Age Matters by post. Sources, including back numbers, is also accessible on the U3A website – Sources Online from the 'publication' drop-down menu (Edition no 1 includes some places to get further information).

Internet. This can be a useful source but do be careful of the origins of information. Some material is heavily biased to a particular point of view; other articles are factually wrong, including some labelled as 'sources for teachers'.

University Course Material. Someone in your U3A may have completed a recent university course and be willing to loan you their course notes. Open University material is particularly good.

Open Learn. This is a free resource from the Open University. Access through <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/>

Universities, Colleges and Schools. Many universities, colleges and schools are enthusiastic towards helping their local communities. Make contact with your local educational establishments and see whether they are able to offer you support or facilities.

Other Information. Libraries, Museums (including their websites) Local Authorities, New Scientist, photography and computer magazines. Daily Newspapers, the Technical Press.

Programme Ideas

Stimulate Ideas. Read through publications such as New Scientist for subjects likely to catch the interest of your group. Then mentally look around your acquaintances with the thought “Who do I know who knows something about that”? Someone with even limited knowledge probably knows more than the rest of the Group and may be persuaded to start a discussion on the subject.

Not only Science and Technology. Try looking at other disciplines for one or more meetings. For example, mix in some Industrial Archaeology, concentrate on the life of one engineer or scientist, study the history and future of transport or think about our environment.

Share the load. Don’t do it all yourself. Persuade other members of the group to take over some of the programme or administrative tasks.

Offer practical help. When other members agree to lead a meeting or part of one don’t leave them to flounder alone. Offer to help them with finding material and deciding how best to present it.

Technology can be a barrier. Videos, DVDs, overhead transparencies, 35mm slides and digital projectors are valuable tools for any Group. However, they can be a worry to those who haven’t used them before so make sure that new users are offered friendly help.

Variety. Vary your programme between talks, discussions, workshops and external visits.

Try a ‘Lucky Dip’. Plan ahead by two months or so and get all members to submit a question requiring an answer lasting about 10–15 mins (a bit like the back page of the New Scientist). These are put in a hat and drawn randomly for presentation at a later meeting.

Have an occasional outside expert speaker. Ideas for speakers may be obtained from the scientific press, "The World of Learning" (reference library), lists of industrial and commercial organisations, the calendar of your nearest university. Notices of meetings issued by the learned societies, particularly The Royal Society. If you are in the vicinity, call in and ask the reception desk if you may look at their notice board.

Try a Quiz. People respond to quizzes, particularly if they are working in teams rather than individually.

Make the most of a speaker. Invite visiting speakers to lunch and pick their brains.

Try using ‘props’. Have a meeting where members bring an article from home and speak about it for a few minutes. Articles could be as every day as a calculator or bicycle wheel but some might surprise everybody.

Look outside the Group or your U3A. Your Group may have a lot in common with other Groups in your U3A. Take a look at the programmes they operate with a view to holding a joint meeting or site visit. Similarly, your neighbouring U3A Science and Technology Groups may be willing to combine for some meetings or recommend speakers from their own ranks.

What are others doing? Make full use of U3A and other conferences and meetings to network with other leaders and share ideas. Some Science and Technology Groups publish programmes on their website and at least one (Old Basing and District) publishes a report of their meetings.

Ideas for Meetings. Here are a few subjects selected at random from some Groups’ programmes:

Archaeology and Evidence, Aspects of the Environment, AIDS, Astronomy, The Ageing Process, Banknotes and Printing, Bio–medical, Chemistry, Digital Photography – cameras and how to improve, Earthquakes and Volcanoes, Engineering, Explosives – propellants and rockets, Flight – principles and development, Food Chains – their relevance, Geology and Botany, Great Scientists, Health and Safety , Holography, ICT, The Worlds of Informatics, Lasers – how they work and their uses, Materials, The Mega Computer The Micro Chip, Paint and Adhesives,Plastics in Security Products, Plastics in Sport, Physics, Science and Ethics, Science in the Home, Transport, Weather and Climate.

Did this help?

This pamphlet has been assembled with the help of several Science and Technology Groups around the country. I hope that it has helped you. **If you can see ways in which it could be improved please let me know.**

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