

Accessibility for Disabled Members

U3As must do all they can to be as accessible as possible both to their existing members and to third agers in their local communities who may wish to join. U3As must take all reasonable steps to ensure that people with disabilities can attend the interest groups of their choice, without necessarily needing a companion/carer with them and it is important to reassure them that you will do all you can to support them and make their attendance as easy and stress-free as possible.

Members who cannot manage to participate in their chosen U3A activities without help, should be given the opportunity to bring a companion/carer with them, who for the time that they are in attendance, will be covered by the liability insurance provided by The Third Age Trust. The only exception to this is a professionally employed carer who would have to be covered by an individual liability policy.

VENUES - GENERAL MEETINGS

As far as possible ensure your venue fulfils the following criteria:

- Served by public transport.
- Adequate car parking facilities onsite or very close at hand including disabled parking bays.
- Ramp for building access.
- Ground floor accommodation where possible. If you are considering upper floor accommodation because there is a lift, you must ensure that onsite help can be provided with evacuation in the event of a fire.
- Accessible and usable disabled toilet facilities.
- Good disabled access.
- A sound system and loop.
- Spacious enough to cope with wheelchairs/mobility scooters.
- Good lighting.
- Access to heating/air conditioning controls.

In addition, consider the following:

- Making a map and directions available for new members.
- Having a designated person at general meetings who is easily identifiable, to ensure disabled members are provided with appropriate seating e.g. at the front for those who have vision or hearing loss and at the end of a row for those with mobility problems etc.
- Timing and length of meetings – e.g. not too early, not too late and not too long without a break.

VENUES – INTEREST/ACTIVITY GROUPS

Try to have a balance between groups in members' homes which tend to be inaccessible and outside accommodation which ideally will be suitable for all. A member's home may be accessible because it has a level entrance or a wide doorway or a ground floor toilet or no internal stairs, and it would be very useful to know this. If you do have a disabled member who wants to attend a group held in a house which is inaccessible for any reason, investigate whether there are any other options available to you, for example, could the group be hosted by that member.

COMMUNICATION

Ensure that a member of the committee takes responsible for maintaining contact with all disabled members to discover whether anything can reasonably be done by the committee to make life easier for them whilst they are participating in U3A activities. Don't assume you know the difficulties they face. Talk to them. If having done all you can to make your interest/activity groups accessible and open to disabled members you find that there are still members who cannot participate in their chosen activities without help it is very important that you tell them, as stated above, that they are able to bring a companion or carer with them for support, who may happen to be a nominated U3A member as well and who must remain for the extent of the activity. This should allow all members with a disability to continue to be able to participate and enjoy U3A and at the same time avoid other members getting involved in providing assistance which they are not insured to do.