

Chester U3A's Accessibility Policy

1. General Introduction

Chester U3A aims to be as inclusive as possible and to provide equal rights of access to our U3A activities, as far as reasonably practicable.

Our policy has been developed in line with guidance from the Third Age Trust. Members with a disability are encouraged to make contact with the Accessibility

Officer, who will try to ensure that everything reasonable is done to make life easier for them whilst they are participating in U3A activities. Members requiring assistance should also speak to relevant Group coordinator

Co-ordinators, who are briefed on disability matters and who should report back on any outstanding problems to the Accessibility Officer.

Because there is such a wide range of disabilities (some obvious, some hidden), members should be expected to talk to their coordinator to express their individual needs.

Members who are unable to participate in their chosen U3A activities without help may be able 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. The ability to bring a carer with them 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.

Disabled members should note that, for **U3A trips and holidays**, we are happy to include them wherever possible. However, it is important that any disabled member who wishes to travel makes their own arrangements for care sufficient for their needs. The organiser is not responsible for anyone who cannot manage without help.

2. Accessibility for Members with a Physical Disability

We attempt to be as accessible as possible both to our existing members and to third agers who may wish to join. We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people with disabilities can attend the interest groups of their choice and will support them and make their attendance as easy and stress-free as possible.

Venue for General Meetings

Our venue complies with the following criteria:

- Served by public transport.
- Adequate car parking facilities onsite including disabled parking bays.
- Level access to the building, with good disabled access, including for wheelchairs/mobility scooters.
- Ground floor accommodation.
- Accessible and usable disabled toilet facilities.
- A sound system and loop.
- Good lighting.
- Appropriate location of seating for disabled members, 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.

- Mid-morning meetings to make it as easy as possible for people to attend.

Venues for Interest/Activity Groups

Many of our meetings are held in village halls, church halls and other public venues which are fully accessible. Some have hearing loops. It is recommended that anyone with a hearing problem sits as close to the speaker as possible.

However, a number of groups are held in private houses, where accessibility may be a problem. We advise that before joining a group you make contact with the Accessibility Officer or the group coordinator to discuss your needs and assess if the venue is suitable.

If a disabled member cannot attend a group of their choice, they might be assisted and encouraged to set up a group at a location suited to their needs.

As noted above, disabled members may bring a carer with them to any group they attend if that is necessary.

3. Supporting Members with Vision Loss

U3A members with vision loss will be supported as far as reasonably possible so that they can continue to enjoy and participate in U3A activities. Group Co-ordinators, if necessary with the help of the Accessibility Officer, should be able to explain whether a particular group is suitable for people with different levels of vision loss.

We will:

- Provide seating close to the front to allow members with some vision loss to be as close to visual displays as possible, and to use their hearing more easily to follow what is going on.
- Try to reduce glare from windows and lights
- If available on prior request we will, provide copies of presentations for use on a member's own laptop, which is often adapted for their specific needs.
- Ensure that convenors are informed ahead of any event of any requests for specific arrangements in sufficient time for them to be made.

Printed information to support members with vision loss may be requested. It is recommended that such documents follow the criteria below:

- Have a good contrast between text and background, eg black on white or dark blue on cream. Coloured lettering other than for large text titles will be avoided.
- Ideally have a minimum type size of 14 point (or 18 point if produced specifically for visually impaired people), with a wide line spacing.
- Use a regular (upright) sans serif font (eg Arial or Verdana). Avoid italics and decorative fonts.
- Avoid paper with a glossy finish.

Adaptive technology e.g. speech synthesis and magnification cannot be supplied by Chester u3a.

Assistive technology

Members will be encouraged to use their own assistive technology aids to enable their interest group participation. Chester U3A does not provide any member assistive technology.

3. Supporting Members with Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can vary from mild to severe and may also prevent members from taking part in events and groups because they want to avoid feeling cut off from people in social situations. In all cases, it is important to approach the matter sensitively and appreciate that it can be difficult for members to admit, either to themselves or to others, that they are losing their hearing.

We will:

- Provide hearing loops (fixed or portable) in the general meeting hall and in as many other venues as possible
- Ensure that Group-Co-ordinators and other relevant members are made aware of the best ways to communicate with a person who has hearing loss (see below).

Group Co-ordinators should:

- Where possible, use a venue with a loop system or take a portable system and use microphones where available.
- Check that any hearing support systems are working correctly before a talk.
- Let speakers know that some members of the audience are hard of hearing so they can adapt their speed and position.
- Try to minimize extraneous noise.
- Encourage those who are hard of hearing to sit nearest the speaker or group leader.
- Make sure that members take turns in speaking and encourage use of hand signals to attract attention.
- Have a pen and paper ready to write something down if necessary.
- Make written notes available on request, either during the session or as soon as possible afterwards.

Best practice for communicating with someone with a hearing loss:

- Ensure that you are speaking clearly and distinctly but without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements.
- Speak at normal speed or just slightly slower, pausing between sentences and making sure you have been understood before moving on.
- Use plain language and don't waffle.
- Avoid using sentences that are unnecessarily long and complex, and if the member has not understood what has been said, try and find a different way of saying it.
- Say the member's name before beginning a conversation. This gives the listener opportunity to focus attention so the first few words are not lost.
- Ask a member if they have better hearing in one ear or another and make sure you are standing in the best place.

Lip Reading

- Find out who is lip reading so that you can be aware of how you position yourself in the room in relation to them.

- Face the person you are talking to as much as possible and keep your hands away from your face when talking.
- Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking.
- Be aware of light levels: avoid situations where light is shining in members' eyes or where lighting is too low to see someone's face clearly.
- Horseshoe or boardroom-style layouts can increase visibility.
- If you have speakers, ideally they should be in front of a plain background and not too high.
- Use lapel microphones or ask speakers to ensure hand-held microphones do not obscure their face.

Appendix. Useful Contacts:

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB): www.rnib.org.uk

Tel: 0303 123 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Action for Blind People www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk Tel: 020 7635 4800

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID): www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Tel: 03330 144525 Textphone: 03330 144530 Email: solutions@hearingloss.org.uk

National Association of Deafened People www.nadp.org.uk

Tel: 0845 055 9663

Email: enquiries@nadp.org.uk

British Deaf Association www.bda.org.uk Tel: 020 7697 4140

Email: bda@bda.org.uk

Hearing Link www.hearinglink.org Tel: 0300 111 1113

Email: helpdesk@hearinglink.org

UK Council on Deafness www.deafcouncil.org.uk Tel: 07903 560037

British Tinnitus Association www.tinnitus.org.uk Tel: 0800 018 0527 (free); 0114 250 9922 Email: info@tinnitus.org.uk

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