

Last March, I issued a statement which clarified the situation with regard to U3A members who could not manage to participate in their chosen U3A activities without help, by stating unequivocally that the liability insurance provided to all member U3As by The Third Age Trust would cover the attendance of a companion/carer.

However, this is not meant to suggest that U3As should not 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.

VENUES - GENERAL MEETINGS

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

- Served by public transport
- Adequate car parking facilities onsite or at least close at hand including disabled parking bays
- Ramp for building access
- Ground floor accommodation or upper floor with lift
- Accessible and usable disabled toilet facilities
- Good disabled access for all types of impairments
- A loop within the sound system
- 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 are partially sighted and at the end of a row for those with mobility problems etc.
- Timing and length – e.g not too early and not too late; not too long, without a break

VENUES – INTEREST/ACTIVITY GROUPS

Try to have a balance between groups in members' homes which tend not to be accessible and outside accommodation which ideally will be accessible to all. If you have a disabled member who wants to attend a group that is inaccessible for any reason please talk to one another. Investigate whether any members who are struggling to attend a class in private accommodation, could either host a group themselves or arrange for it to be hosted at their place of residence. Most issues can be resolved with negotiation.

COMMUNICATION

Ensure that a member of the committee is 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 e.g. organising a car share scheme.

Don't assume you know the problems/difficulties they face. Talk to them.

28 February 2011