

Many U3As arrange excellent “social” events for their members ranging from outings to Christmas lunches, as well as organising travel either in Europe or the UK. The purpose of this advice sheet is to recommend best practice to ensure you are always covered under U3A insurance policies and that neither participating members nor the organisers are putting themselves at risk.

There are three types of activities that are considered in this advice sheet:

1. Social Events – Day trips; wine & cheese events; Xmas lunches; garden parties etc. open to all members of the U3A.
2. Study Group Travel – Outings including both travel and accommodation as an extension of a study group activity.
3. Holiday – Trips over several days in either UK or Europe, open to all members of the U3A.

Organiser

Such activities, once the committee has given its approval, are normally put together by an organiser or a small committee. The organiser is responsible for making the bookings, arranging the transport and accommodation or in the case of a holiday, arranging the travel package with the travel agent/company. However, all the financial arrangements must be overseen by the main committee of the U3A, usually the Treasurer. In addition all contracts must be signed by a Trustee on behalf of and in the name of the U3A. When organising day events or study group travel, care must be taken in making any prepayments, as there is no money cover insurance provided.

Social Events

The organiser will arrange an event at a suitable date with the venue and then, in liaison with the Treasurer, arrange with the venue and transport operator the contract, deposit and method of payment. The organiser and Treasurer will then agree a “sales” price usually including a small mark-up as a contingency. The prospective attendees will usually contact the organiser direct to make a booking and send a cheque but in some cases it may go directly to the Treasurer. All cheques should be made out to the U3A and to the U3A social account in particular if one exists. The organiser must never collect cash, cheques in his/her name or pay for a venue or coach by means of a personal debit/credit card or cheque. Ignoring this will mean that it becomes a personal rather than a business transaction and it could have insurance implications and place the organiser at financial risk. In order to ensure that all monies are handled correctly, all payments must be made with the full involvement of the committee, with cheques being signed by two trustees.

Study Group Travel

The organiser in this case will be the group organiser/leader but the process is similar to that detailed above for Social Events except that accommodation is required and is included in the price. By arranging such trips, the organiser could be considered under the EU Group Package Travel Regulations to be the tour operator and therefore liable for any damages or accidents that might occur. So in order to safeguard group leaders, the Trust has arranged insurance which will protect them should anything untoward happen.

NB. All monies for study group travel should pass through the main U3A account.

Holidays

As far as U3A holidays are concerned, the only safe way to organise them is through a travel agency/company so that you are fully covered by their liability insurance. In addition, all payments should be made on an individual basis, directly to the company and not to the U3A. In this way a contract is clearly established between an individual and the company rather than with the U3A as an entity, which is a much safer way to do it. There is, however, no reason why the organiser should not collect cheques and then either send them in one batch or deliver them.

If you do organise a holiday yourselves, you will have no money insurance and in the event of a serious incident on holiday involving a U3A member or members, you would have no insurance in place to protect you and the organiser(s) could be in serious trouble and deemed personally liable.

Insurance

As long as the basic procedures outlined above are followed, then U3A liability insurance will cover your social events and study group travel in the UK and Europe, both with respect to third party liability and member to member cover. If you wish to extend an invitation to members of other U3As that is fine.

It must be clearly understood, however, that it does not include personal accident/injury or travel insurance, both of which are the personal responsibility of each U3A member to take out.

A further policy – Tour Operator Liability Insurance – covers a group leader who organises a travel trip for the study group and does not use a travel agency.

Some major venues are now asking groups to provide a cover note so that they can check that the policy is current and the extent of the cover, which is in fact up to £5m.

Other Matters

1. Charity Commission for England and Wales.

Income and expenditure associated with social events does not have to be included in the official annual return. Their definition of social is wide ranging, but it is safe to define it as any event open to all members and not specifically part of an interest group activity, for which members pay to participate. Thus both social events and holidays as listed above would qualify as social. Whilst the Charity Commission does not need the information on social events, your members are entitled to have a full report, therefore it is recommended that the income less expenditure is shown in the accounts as nett income. Note that whilst an individual event might make a small loss the U3A cannot support a subsidy on an annual basis so this item should always be positive.

NB. If you are a registered charity in Scotland you have to report all U3A accounts.

2. Free Trips.

When arranging such events it often happens that the organiser is offered a free trip for every 20 places booked, say. It is important that the main committee agrees in advance how these free places will be used by either reducing the overall cost per user or by rewarding the hard work of the organiser with a free place.

3. Cancellations.

Usually if a potential attendee cancels with sufficient time, the organiser can recover some or all of the cost from the venue but not the share of the transport. The main committee should decide what its policy is in this matter and issue guidelines as it is not reasonable for the organiser to have to handle this situation without guidance.

4. Use of Debit/ Credit Cards

It is bad practice to use a personal credit or debit card. As more and more venues will only accept payment by card it will become essential for U3A to arrange a card on their account. All major clearance banks have now agreed to offer debit cards to charities. The suggested conditions for their use are contained in the Treasurer's Newsletter dated November 2010 and in the booklet Information for Treasurers.