Exeter u3a Guidance on selecting and appointing speakers to monthly meetings

Exeter Speaker Selection Process

Exeter u3a's speaker programme needs to further our charitable aims, which are laid out in our constitution dated May 2026

'The charity's object is the advancement of education and, in particular, the education of older people and those retired from full time work, by all means including associated activities conducive to learning and personal development in Exeter and surrounding district.'

The Speaker Team

The monthly meeting speaker programme is intended to inform and entertain the members attending or viewing the event on-line. The process of selecting and arranging speakers for the monthly U3A meetings is the business of the Speaker Team which meets ~~every 6/8~~ quarterly ~~weeks~~ to review the planned speakers and decide on the details of managing forthcoming events. The team's proposals will be reported regularly to the committee for review and approval. That report should assist the committee in addressing the issues set out in the section below headed 'The Committee'.

Planning ahead

The team should maintain a list of potential speakers from which to draw their programme. Information about potential speakers may come from other u3as or other bodies with similar programmes, from direct experience or from recommendations by Exeter u3a members or interest groups. From time to time the team should prompt members and interest groups to consider what recommendations they would make for speakers or for topics. The programme should cover a range of subjects likely to appeal to the wide range of members' interests.

Speakers make varying charges for their services and the team will need to balance these costs against the interest members are likely to have either in the speaker or the topic and in light of the u3a's speaker budget. The speaker team should make preliminary enquiries of potential speakers, explaining the purpose of the u3a's monthly meeting speaker programme and seeking provisional expressions of interest and information about fees and availability. Speakers will be advised that this will help in establishing a provisional timetable for approval by the committee. The speaker team will provide each prospective speaker with a copy of this guidance.

Speakers occasionally ask for a contribution to a charity rather than a payment. The u3a cannot make a contribution to another charity and the speaker would need to receive a payment and then make any contribution on their own account. However, when a speaker represents a charity then their payment can be made to that charity provided the Exeter u3a charity speaker payment form is completed. The team will submit its proposed speaker programme to the committee for their approval. At this point new bookings will not have been made but potential speakers may have limited availability and so the proposed programme should be presented to the committee in sufficient time to ensure alternative arrangements can be put in place if for some reason a proposed speaker cannot be approved and re-scheduling proves necessary. The committee needs also to attend to this

report promptly for the same reason. That report will set out the topics, the timings, any significant conditions the speaker seeks to have met (eg. no recording), the fees asked for and any relevant background information about the speaker.

Logistics at the monthly meeting

For forthcoming events the team should address the logistics of forthcoming events and determine who is the main contact for the scheduled speaker. That person should liaise with the speaker or their representative to ensure that everyone is clear about the details – date and time, any technical requirements (eg projector slides), access requirements, parking arrangements, whether they are willing to have the event recorded, book sales and the nature of those publications, fees and whether they will take questions or not.

People with the following roles need to be identified – meeting the speaker, making introductions to the u3a team and venue technician, making the introduction to the meeting, managing the roving mic for questions (if applicable), making the vote of thanks, helping to carry books or equipment back to the car if required, confirming arrangements for payment, thanking the speaker personally and seeing them off. The team will be supported in these activities as necessary by members of the committee on the day.

The Committee

The committee will receive the speaker team's proposed programme of speakers at appropriate dates which ensure that there is time for consideration of the programme and for its adjustment if necessary. The committee will consider the proposed programme in relation to any risks it might create in relation to Exeter u3a's charitable aims and its responsibilities.

In addition to the general aim stated above the u3a is obliged to be non-political and non-religious. The Third Age Trust has advised that this means that it should not align itself to any political party or religion. It follows that the u3a should not invite a speaker to address a topic which might be seen as doing either of these things. A wide range of potential speakers may be members of a political party or religious organisation. Many of these people may be well placed to inform or entertain our membership on a non-political or non-religious topic without risk of aligning Exeter u3a with a political party or religion provided that before being invited they are made aware of the importance of not doing so. The committee should satisfy itself that these requirements have been met in devising the speaker programme.

The Third Age Trust's advisory document 'u3a Guidance – being non political' (dated 2026) will be followed by Exeter u3a. This document outlines what it means to be 'non political' in the context of charities and gives examples of acceptable and non-acceptable activities.

Beyond these matters arising directly from Exeter u3a's nature and purpose the committee needs also to be satisfied that a potential speaker will not:

1. Incite those attending to commit a criminal act.
2. Express unlawful views.
3. Be in direct support of an organisation which is proscribed or whose aims and objectives are illegal.
4. Promote views that denigrate those of a particular gender, faith, race or sexual orientation.

5. Undermine Exeter u3a's reputation or values or undermine its ability to comply with its legal or charitable obligations.

This guidance was originally adopted by Exeter u3a on 6 November 2023. The guidance has been updated October 2026 with the following changes:

1. updated aims of Exeter u3a (to the change in the constitution dated May 2026)
2. changing speaker team meetings from 6 – 8 weeks to quarterly
3. reference to the TAT's guidance on non-political activities within the charity sector

Next review date October 2030