

What is a Satellite u3a?

This is the definition supplied by National u3a.

'A Satellite u3a is a model where one Committee oversees the running of a u3a across multiple areas. This means that groups are run in different areas and may mean there is a monthly meeting held at each location. This model enables members from a wider geographical area to join a local u3a and attend groups and monthly meetings in a location that suits them best.'

Why did Whickham and District u3a want to develop a Satellite u3a?

I, the Chair of Whickham and District u3a live in Blaydon and there's not much going on. Our u3a is called Whickham and District, but the majority of our members are from only two areas, those being Whickham and Sunnyside. Only 3 members are from Blaydon, one is from Winlaton and one is from Ryton.

A Satellite u3a was thought to be one way of increasing our membership by extending our footprint.

I was told that about 12 -14 years ago there was an inaugural meeting in Blaydon to start a Blaydon u3a. People did attend, but no one was willing to take on any responsibilities. Does this ring a bell? Also, Ryton u3a dissolved just after COVID, because they couldn't form a Committee.

The most important thing is to get the Committee agreeing to start this adventure. Without the Committee's agreement and input it won't work. Whickham is fortunate to have a proactive Committee and a proactive publicity team. Without everyone's contribution we would have got nowhere.

The Satellite u3a will be under the umbrella of Whickham and District u3a Committee, so no new Committee will be formed. All new Blaydon, Winlaton and Ryton members will be able to access all Whickham's Interest Groups, events eg Christmas Party, coach trips etc and be registered on Whickham's Beacon system.

I did a lot of research about local public transport. Found out that there isn't a direct bus from Blaydon, Winlaton and Ryton to Sunnyside, where we hold our main meetings. I also researched in the specific three areas, venues eg church halls, community centres, libraries, hairdressers, shops, barbers, GP practices etc etc

I applied for a grant from National. It was under the heading of the Membership Growth and Community Connections Grant. I received £500. This money has mainly been spent on advertising. Unless 'Jo Public' knows what is happening then no new members will be forthcoming. We divided our work into these three areas. Two members targeted Blaydon, two Winlaton and two Ryton. This is so we could flood these areas with adverts ie posters and leaflets. We have distributed 800 leaflets and 30 posters. We also have an advert in a local magazine that covers these 3 areas. The advert is in the magazine for four months. Whickham is also on Facebook, so for the past few weeks I have been posting on our Facebook page.

I have to write a report for National at the end of the year to see if our 'adventure' has progressed.

A venue was found. Blaydon Library is in Blaydon precinct next door to a massive free (for 3 hours) car park. The bus station is a 3 minute walk away. The manager of the library was very helpful. Whickham have organised a coffee morning and a separate speaker's event for each of the 3 months, October, November and December, as a trail run in the library. The library has not charged anything for these 6 events. If we continue then they will only charge us half price going into 2027.

At all the Blaydon coffee mornings there will be a PowerPoint rolling loop, advertising of all our 16 interest groups held at Whickham, the events we hold on a regular basis, the titles of speakers that we're able to arrange etc. This is so new people see what we have to offer and what we can arrange. We will also have literature advertising Whickham and also the Blaydon satellite u3a, as well as copies of our monthly newsletter. Whickham's Committee and some Group Leaders are going to be present at the first Blaydon coffee morning on October 13th.

I would love to think we would have about 20 new members in the next 6 months. Saying that I have already been told by our Membership Secretary- he's our contact person on the leaflets, that 10 new people are coming along to our first coffee morning and that's without people not informing us.

Of the new Blaydon, Winlaton and Ryton members I would like to encourage volunteers to take on the role of setting up a group. I already have a Yoga Group being offered.

Staff at National have been extremely helpful, pointing me in the right direction.

Kathy Clegg and Jane Mathieson, the two u3a North East Region Regional Representatives, are up dated on a regular basis about our progress. They are coming to our first coffee morning, as is one of the Blaydon Councillors. I have also asked a bespoke u3a photographer to take photos of our first meeting.

If anyone wants any more information or if I can help in any way please contact me

07881768301 or email cecu3a@gmail.com

If we are successful it will be the first Satellite u3a in the u3a North East Region.

Cecilia Coulson 30/9/2026