

Learning Grants Scheme Update for Interest Groups, September 2026

Evaluation and awards

We were delighted to receive 13 applications for Learning Grants, covering a wide range of activities. All were considered likely to enhance members' learning, while also strengthening group bonds and providing an enjoyable shared experience. In some cases, groups also suggested possible spin-off benefits for other members.

The Evaluation Team met on 6th and 7th August and was happy to make full or partial awards to all 13 projects. All team members scrutinised all applications in advance. We believe that the process was fair and robust. The meetings went smoothly with an open exchange of views and a good level of consensus. All evaluators with a potential conflict of interest signed a declaration that they had not participated in discussion of that application.

We were pleased to find that, with most projects funded in full, the total came to £4890, just within the agreed £5000 limit. Where part funding was agreed, the applicants had requested a 'best scenario' higher amount. In some of these cases we agreed to fund the event but not the associated travel costs; in others we considered that a member contribution would be appropriate, or that there was scope to reduce the estimated costs. In a few cases we set conditions. We also clarified that where the grant funded a subscription, this was limited to one year only.

Only one grant of over £500 was agreed, for a project which was very clearly costed, sought to be inclusive and showed flexibility about how the grant could be used in conjunction with member contributions. The Management Committee subteam (Jenny Thwaites, Bernice O'Reilly and Rose Noonan) agreed to this grant.

Ref.	Group	Project title	Awarded	Full or part funding
App-01	Petanque	Petanque Skills Coaching	£108	full
App-02	Petersfield Dippers	Front Crawl Tuition	£500	full
App-03	Bridge Friendly	Bridge Learning Day	£500	part
App-04	Tai Chi	Breadth and Balance Workshop	£134	full
App-05	French Linguists who Laugh	One Year's Subscription to Bien-Dire	£275	full
App-06	Writing Groups	Writing Workshop	£500	part
App-07	Gardening	Practical Gardening Courses	£640	part
App-08	Spanish (Improvers and Hola)	Spanish Learning and Improvement	£291	full
App-09	Local History	Book on Development of Petersfield	£500	full
App-10	Wine Appreciation	Comparisons of Wine Making	£250	full
App-11	Café Philo	Philosophy Learning Sessions	£500	full
App-12	Playreading	Backstage Tour	£310	part
App-13	French Convo	French Impressionists Live	£382	part
		Total	£4890	

All applicants were emailed of the outcome of their own application in mid-August, and asked to complete an Acceptance form which specified any conditions attached to the award and asked for their preferred method of payment and if appropriate bank details. These are being stored in Teams as they come in and shared with our Treasurer, Patrick Rudden, who intends to make payments available from mid-September.

Applicants were also given feedback based on the comments of the evaluation team, along with an Information Sheet.

We would particularly like to thank our member evaluators (Pamela Peacock, Madeline Fox, Vanessa Harvey and Meg Gardner) for their invaluable participation. We enjoyed working with them and valued their perceptive comments highly.

Next steps:

(a) End-of-project report: advance information

We will prepare and circulate a report document so that all groups know what they will be asked to report on at the end of their project, and can collect information, photographs etc if they wish as they carry out their projects. This will consist of:

- a simple structured questionnaire – likely to include one or more questions specific to the group in question
- a short qualitative report to give us a flavour of the project and the benefits for participants

The report will be used in the MC evaluation of the pilot Learning Grants Scheme in the spring, and we hope to be able to publish at least some groups' reports in Connect or on the website.

(b) Ongoing monitoring

Two applicants were asked to submit confirmed costings and event details by mid-October, and one was asked to submit a summary of costs of a tranche of bookings, once confirmed.

Groups will be asked to email a very brief update on progress towards the end of 2026, unless their projects have been completed. This will enable us to report on overall progress to MC in January.

(c) Reporting to members

We plan to include a short article for the wider membership, and congratulate successful applicants in Connect, in the near future. We have also agreed that one or both of us will talk about the scheme at the AGM in November.

Doreen Challen and Peter Lake
August 2026