

Chair's Report – AGM November 9th 2016

Thank you for taking the time to attend this AGM and for your continued support of the groups and wider events during the course of the last year. My thanks also to those who have put in time preparing the hall and refreshments.

Current membership is 409

Groups

Groups have continued to prosper. There have been some changes in group leadership but this is largely a natural process and reflects a healthy U3A life. Very sadly we have lost George Kelly this year. This loss has been keenly felt by many but clearly most profoundly by Carolyn his wife. We are deeply grateful for the contribution George has made to the U3A over many years. George was a humble and principled man possibly unaware as to the very high esteem in which many held him. We are also very grateful that Carolyn has felt able to continue as U3A secretary, which she has done with great courage and a ready smile. Thank you Carolyn. Very recently we received news that Elizabeth Bowden has died. Elizabeth was for a number of years a group leader and will be known to many.

Others have also lost loved ones over the year and to all we extend our sympathy and best wishes. Thankfully the U3A is also a means through which friendship, interests and purpose can continue and so if I may on behalf of all who have found support and friendship this year in the U3A I would like to thank those who have offered it.

For a healthy U3A to continue we need to encourage fresh leadership as well as appreciate current group leadership. This may take the form of new interest groups or when groups have a significant waiting list through forming a second group. Group leadership should not be thought of as a life sentence. Leaders should feel able to step down and hand on the mantle. As a committee we would like to encourage flexible approaches, which can relieve the burden of leadership if necessary. We are thinking of ways of sharing leadership, possible rotating leadership, offering guidance when somebody is taking on a new role, making it clear that it is OK to say I am prepared to do this for a fixed or limited time. If any group is facing leadership questions I encourage you to discuss this with myself, Roger or members of the committee.

In some cases groups can have a limited life and do not have to continue for ever. The iPad group was such a case, when the group had learnt those things it wished to learn it appropriately closed.

Most of all I wish to thank members for supporting groups regularly and as well thanking all those who lead or help with groups.

I would also like to thank Shirley and Sandy for faithfully posting the newsletters. Thank you also to Christine, Avril and Hazel for organizing the skittles evening.

Committee issues

The committee or trustees have experienced some turn over during the year. This has always been for sound reasons. I wish to thank all the committee members for the work they do. There is a great deal of work in the background achieved by the committee on behalf of all members. This has been done with an excellent spirit and never a cross word. We bring a range of perspectives to issues but we have always been able to reach agreement as to any decision.

The aim of the committee is to facilitate the function of the U3A. We have actively sought to spend U3A money on membership activities fairly to promote our functions.

Central funds have been spent on a new laptop and projector, this is available for all groups. I am pleased that groups are now asking for small grants to improve what they are able to do. The basic principle we adopt is to fund additional sustainable things whilst expecting groups to fund their own every day expenditure. We also provide start up grants for new groups.

New things this year have included the hand rails fitted to the Upper Room steps and a mobile phone wifi link for use by any group. I am hoping this will help encourage new uses of new technology. The lighting in the upper room has been renewed. I am considering ways of improving the heating in the upper room, if anybody has suggestions about this I would be pleased to hear them.

The monthly lunch continues to have a regular and faithful attendance. The speakers have been varied and really stimulating. Usual attendance is around 50. The changes in booking and ordering arrangements have taken place smoothly despite some initial concerns. The hotel was the instigator of the changes but in general it has also made the administration of the lunch a less onerous task.

Other U3As in the area make much more of coffee mornings having monthly events. They are very well attended and perform a popular social function. It is interesting that in our case when we have a coffee morning it is largely a different group of people who attend than the monthly lunch attendees. This seems to indicate that coffee mornings perform a different social function to the lunches. The committee is actively investigating extending our coffee morning provision. We are keen to hear member's views.

An issue that has arisen during the course of the year in more than one group has been where a group is full with a waiting list in some cases existing members have had poor attendance. This has meant that attendance has been below the optimum and members on the waiting list have been prevented from taking up the places. This is a sensitive issue as non-attendance can be for a range of reasons. It would be unreasonable to expect everybody to be able to attend all meetings but there are serious consequences in some groups. These can include a loss of group income when there are fixed costs such as room hire as well as restricting others participation. To support group leaders the trustees are working on guidance for group leaders. In the meantime may I encourage all members to send apologies with as much notice as possible if they are unable to attend meetings.

We held a new members meeting this year. Feedback from this was positive and so we will do so again early in 2017.

The last area I wish to draw members attention to is that of social events for the U3A as a whole. We continue to look for people who are able to help with these in 2017. This need not necessarily be a large commitment it could be to help with catering, ideas, publicity etc depending on what you like doing and feel happy to offer. If you feel you can join in please let Carolyn Kelly know.

Geoff Williams November 2016