

The growth of Barnsley U3A continues unabated. At the time of writing this report we have reached a total of 850 members. The subscription renewal process will no doubt lead to a slight reduction in this number but there is a continued upward trend in our membership numbers. With the creation of a number of new groups we have also retained the overall ratio of around one group per 10 members. This enables us to maintain good levels of interest and support amongst the vast majority of our members. Whilst we have a number of full groups we have been reasonably successful in creating duplicate versions and other alternatives which give options to those unable to join a first choice of group.

There have been some major organisational achievements since the last Annual Report which need to be mentioned. First of all we have successfully implemented the new online membership system using the nationally developed Beacon System. All membership renewals and new memberships are now recorded on this system and for the first time some members have successfully paid their subscriptions online through the PayPal system.

A further organisational change has been the development of a revised Constitution which, after agreement from National Office, is to be presented to the Annual General Meeting in June. The new document tidies up some loose strands and importantly sets time limits on the term of office which can be served by non-officer committee members.

We recognise that communication with our members is a major challenge and whilst our quarterly news magazine and our website are excellent and stand comparison with any other U3A in our region, we recognise that there continues to be a shortfall in getting timely messages around to members. Our closed BU3A Facebook Group helps in the case of 130 members and with a similar but overlapping number signing up to receive emails through the Yahoo Group system [Buzz Newsflash] we have started to make some further progress. However, the major leap forward will be achieved when we commence to use the group email system provided within our online membership system. We hold email addresses for over 600 of our members which means that we will be able to send 'communal' emails to all this group in a timely manner. Work will also be undertaken to allow group messages to be sent to those members who need to be kept up-to-date on their group's activities.

As can be seen from our statement of accounts, our finances are strong and this position will provide us with the opportunity of looking at town centre accommodation which will provide us with a central hub. Thus, both members and the public will be able to "drop in" in order to find out about the U3A and its activities. Such "drop in" arrangements are not provided in the out-of-town premises currently in use.

The big event for us during 2016 will be our 20th Anniversary Celebration for which we are organising a daytime Showcase Event followed by a ticketed evening performance featuring our Choir and Ukulele Group, The Stringalongs. We are fortunate that we have been able to attract a locally based television personality to also join in the celebrations.

Finally, I must say a massive thank you to the Co-ordinators, Committee members and all the other helpers who have supported me upon my return at short notice into the Chairmanship of the Barnsley U3A. Without their support and positive enthusiasm we would not be the success story that I believe us to be.

Alan Swann, Chairman Barnsley and District U3A