Analysis of Darlington u3a's Questionnaire Results Winter 2022/23

BACKGROUND: The Branch had reconvened in the autumn of 2021 but the Committee was experiencing increasing difficulty in achieving effective communication with Members, possibly but not exclusively due to a) fewer members attending the monthly meetings at the King's Head than had previously attended Bond Gate, b) the lack of time for social interaction (coffee break) at the monthly meetings and c) the demise of our Newsletter.

A questionnaire was designed to gather information about Groups, Monthly Meetings and Communications to inform our future development.

The questionnaires were sent out to the 153 people who were members of Darlington u3a at the beginning of December 2022. We received 106 responses giving us a response rate of 69.3%.

RESULTS:

Groups: Members were asked

which of the existing 15 groups they attended currently, which of 8 proposed new groups they would be interested in attending, whether they would like to suggest additional groups or activities (and whether they would be willing to help organise their suggestions).

Existing Groups (15)

Five members did not attend any group – two being new members and two citing health reasons. The remaining 101 members reported attending 201 groups, so an average of two groups per member. However there were members who attended only one group whilst two members reported attending five.

30 members attended 1 group

49 members attended 2 groups

14 members attended 3 groups

5 members attended 4 groups

2 members attended 5 groups

Proposed New Groups (8)

All eight proposed new groups were met with sufficient enthusiasm to make them potentially viable, especially as there are a further 31% of the membership who did not respond to the questionnaire but may be interested in them too.

Of the eight proposed groups, Art, Darts and JollyFit have all commenced, and Wine Appreciation is scheduled to begin at the end of March 2023. History of Art has received an enthusiastic response, as has Tai Chi for which we are in discussion with a potential instructor.

The highest response was elicited by Walking (32 members were interested in Walking 2-4 miles and a further 8 were interested in Longer Walks). We have identified walk leaders' training, an online course promoted by u3a in conjunction with the Ramblers' Association, to ensure we can plan walks safely and responsibly.

We have two members who have indicated they may be interested in undertaking the course, but clearly it would be preferable to generate a resource of 5 or 6 members who could share walk planning and leading responsibilities so the role did not become too onerous for any one person. More volunteers are needed.

Suggested Additional Groups

Members suggested 17 further groups and activities:-

Basic computer skills Crafts Current affairs

Garden visits Gardening Musical Instrument

Photography Poetry Pottery

Reading group Scrabble Sign language

Singing / Choir Stately home visits Theatre

U3a holiday Whist

Sheets for each group or activity will be available at the monthly meeting on 3rd March for members to express an initial interest to enable us to assess likely viability. Members who are not present will be asked to express interest following publication of this report.

NB. Of the groups and activities nominated two people said they could organise their group and two more said they were willing to help. We therefore need members to come forward to help us develop new initiatives.

Monthly Meetings:

Of the 106 responses, 73 members attend the monthly meetings. Of the remaining 33 members 23 proffered reasons for not attending:

7 due to Life – busy schedule / family commitments etc

8 due to conflicting activities

3 due to parking problems

3 due to timing

1 due to venue

1 due to concern about infection control

Attendees offered ideas to improve their experience:

21 suggested a coffee break / time to socialise

15 improved acoustics / sound system

3 more welcoming for new / lone members

3 protected time for Group Leaders to announce changes

3 more upbeat / positive vibe to the meeting

2 move start to 10:30am

1 more informal seating

Communications:

Eight email addresses were corrected / updated and a further ten were newly recorded. We now have 84 email addresses for the 106 respondents and a further 25 addresses for the 47 members who did not respond, making a total of 109 email addresses for our 153 members as at December 2022.

We can therefore communicate with 71% of our members without incurring printing (and possibly postage) costs and the extra work entailed in paper communication.

10 members said they would like help with using email.

41 members would want to join a u3a WhatsApp group.

52 members use our Website with reasons for not using it including

5 no internet

5 not interested / don't think of it

Individual comments not aware we had one

no time

not up to date

never tried / will try

Of the 106 respondents, 88 said they would want a Newsletter (though 14 left the question unanswered). 71 members (81%) elected to receive the Newsletter by email and/or the Website, leaving 17 (19%) opting for a paper copy.

INITIAL CONCLUSIONS:

Groups continue to be the cornerstone of our u3a and there is a strong interest in developing new groups and activities. However we need to encourage existing members to help to organise new initiatives, and additionally we need to encourage new members who have the will and expertise to help us run activities.

It is possible that in collating expressions of interest in groups and activities suggested by members we might be able to recruit helpers and organisers if we can offer support (eg finding a venue, publicising the group etc).

Monthly Meetings Members' suggestions to improve The Monthly Meeting Experience were constructive and helpful, and are being actively explored by the Committee.

Of the reasons given for not attending, 14 / 22 were due to members' busy schedules, conflicts in commitments and other activities which cannot be mitigated by u3a. Of the remaining eight responses we will contact members to discuss ways in which attendance could be made possible.

Communications. We are now able to communicate with over 70% of our members electronically (by email, website or both) which therefore allows us to reduce our printing and postage costs by focussing them on the 30% who need or prefer paper communications. This will also save a considerable amount of Committee members' time.

We are in a position to assist members who have requested help using email, and also to set up a WhatsApp group for those members who have expressed interest.

We have also been provided with some helpful insight into why members do not use the website, and can hope to address these in the near future (if not already addressed).

Report compiled by Victoria Laing 17 February 2023

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