

EPSOM AND EWELL U3A – 2017 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Committee Review September 2016 – August 2017

I am beginning the Committee's report with a reminder about the aims of the organisation we all joined. The aims of the U3A are:

- to encourage and enable older people no longer in full-time paid employment to help each other to share their knowledge, skills, interests and experience;
- to demonstrate the benefits and enjoyment to be gained and the new horizons to be discovered in learning throughout life;
- to celebrate the capabilities and potential of older people and their value to society.

This report sets out what your elected committee has been doing during the past twelve months to meet these objectives.

The Committee has met six times during the year. Several members of the Committee were new to their roles. They have coped well with the steep learning curves they faced.

Rosie Cooper and Sue Wood joined the committee in July pending their election to the Committee at this AGM to take on the role of joint Social Secretaries.

Administration – Much of our business is conducted electronically. Ted Morrey, our Secretary, is the main point of contact. He has seen hundreds of emails cross his desk, some from our own U3A members, others from The Third Age Trust, and others from our local network of U3A's. They have ranged from administration matters to details of courses, study days, exhibitions and conferences we might like to attend, to insurances and of course to advice! He is also responsible for writing the minutes of our committee meetings and AGMs.

Membership – We have seen the membership reach record levels. There are now 1025 members assuming the 158 who have not yet renewed do so in the next couple of weeks. At Open House in May, 25 new members joined on the day making a total of 205 new members this year. Although there have been some resignations (mainly due to health reasons) as fast as we lose members, new members join. At the moment, we are averaging 3 new members a week. We have held two Coffee Mornings. These enable new members to meet the Committee and learn more about the U3A so that they can get the most out of their membership. Some new group leaders have resulted from this initiative.

Groups – The groups are fundamental to the U3A. While a few groups have folded during the year several more have been set up. We now have 127 groups and more are in the pipeline to meet demand as the membership numbers increase.

After nearly 4 years as Group Co-ordinator Jan Painter has decided it is time for her to step down. She has passed the job over to Dave Starling who has already made some good changes and got some new groups under way. Janet wishes him every success and thanks everyone for their help over the past 4 years.

Dave has been involved in setting up some completely new groups such as Cycling and Guitar, additional groups where the existing ones do not have vacancies, and revitalising existing groups. Dave has valued the assistance he has received from group leaders in Banstead U3A who have the experience we do not.

Several groups applied for and were given the £75 grants that continued to be made available to them. However, we have decided to cease giving grants in the current financial year as there are other projects to be funded.

The Committee met with Group Leaders in April and gave them a buffet lunch to show their appreciation for their hard work and commitment. Open House in May enabled existing as well as new members to find new interests.

However, only two thirds of our members belong to a group. Many prefer just to come to the Monday morning meetings where attendances have frequently been over 100. There have been varied and interesting talks which from their titles do not seem very promising but in the event prove to be excellent. Details of the 2018 programme will be in the autumn Newsletter.

Publicity – They say that the best form of publicity is recommendation. For us this is true as we gain most of our new members from recommendation. Over the last twelve months the most significant activity for James Hadley, our Publicity Officer, has been tidying up our website to make it more attractive to our members, newcomers, and enquirers who are interested in joining us. Then there is the continuing need to keep it accurate and up to date - so input and corrections from group leaders and members are always welcome. In addition to publicising our own activities, there is a "Community" tab where we post news and events notified to us by local societies and charities. Meanwhile local libraries, day centres and doctors' waiting rooms have been regularly topped up with our leaflet and application form.

Social Activities – Over the past year Chris Rae, our Social Secretary, has arranged a variety of trips: a visit to Royal Holloway College; Parham House; a trip on the Bluebell Railway followed by going round Sheffield Park; and a guided tour round St Paul's Cathedral. We also went to Leeds Castle and Sussex Prairie Gardens followed by a visit to St Mary's Bramber. We again used City and Village Tours with their Blue Badge Guides to provide outings that are enjoyable and informative. This year we were guided round the Spitalfields and Whitechapel area followed by a trip to the Art Gallery at Guildhall.

The Christmas function in December was a cruise on the River Thames with lunch for 90. The event was subsidised from surpluses arising from social outings.

The holidays continue to be popular. A group of 30 spent five days in Hereford in September 2016 visiting the Wye Valley and the cathedral cities of Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester. In April 2017 36 people enjoyed five days in Cheshire.

Chris is also stepping down but we have been fortunate in finding two very willing volunteers to take on jointly the task of organising the social outings.

Joan Brown arranged three theatre outings by coach and two non-coach options over the year. These were a mixture of plays, both comic and supernatural, and ballet with Wimbledon being the main venue. We would like to thank Joan for all her hard work in finding and organising these outings.

Communication with Members – The Newsletter that we publish twice a year gives details of events planned for the next 6 months. Although electronic communication is becoming the norm we will continue to send out a printed Newsletter. To supplement this, U3A News is now being sent each month to the 85% of our members with e-mail to keep them up to date with U3A activities locally, regionally and nationally. This is especially useful where events are in the near future. It also keeps members involved. We try to point members in the right direction and encourage them to obtain information for themselves.

Changes in the Committee – As already mentioned we are saying farewell to Janet Painter now and Chris Rae at the end of the year. In Chris's place, we welcome Rosie Cooper and Sue Wood who are jointly taking on the organisation of the outings from 2018. Another retiree is Joan Brown who will be stepping down as Theatre organiser at the end of year. We would like to thank them for their contributions in their respective roles.

Future activities – Looking forward, 2018 will see us celebrating our 30th anniversary. We will be marking the occasion with a lunch at Epsom Downs Racecourse on Wednesday, 19 September 2018 so please put the date in your diaries. More details will become available in due course. There will also be a commemorative publication.

I would like to conclude by thanking those individuals not mentioned so far who are not Committee members but who provide invaluable support in running the U3A:

- Terry Caddle who liaises with the speakers and Bourne Hall for our Monday morning meetings;
- Lynda Jennings and those on the Helpers' Register;
- Veronica Wheeler our Welfare Officer who sends out cards to those who have been in hospital or suffered a bereavement.

We are all volunteers. The U3A cannot operate without volunteers. Thank you to all who help in any small way. All U3As are run by members for their members. None of what I have described happens without input from the Committee. Once again we would like to ask for help from the membership to assist on the Committee as shadows, teaming up with an elected officer. It's a good way of learning what goes on and gaining experience while someone else carries the can! With our membership numbers now topping 1000 we would appreciate more help from our existing members.