

Annual Report 2013/14

I am pleased to report another successful year for Chester U3A. We continue to do well with membership. In the past year our numbers reached 948, a relatively small increase of 24 over the previous year. This is the fifth successive year of increase in membership.

Last year we had 162 new members. There were losses as well, which accounts for the small overall increase in number of members. There are many possible reasons for losses; we are an ageing community and illness and death are bound to be responsible for some losses, as is moving away from the Chester area, perhaps to be near children. Clearly some will leave because U3A does not meet their needs but there is no evidence that this is happening on a large scale.

We held a successful meeting for new members in January where they had an opportunity to meet members of the committee and gather more information about our organisation.

This is a suitable moment to pay tribute to our membership secretary Patricia Gifford and her team of helpers, who do a tremendous amount of work very effectively. This includes not only maintaining the membership database, but also dealing with membership renewal and new membership applications, providing information for the Inland Revenue for Gift Aid, which gives us additional income, and updating addresses to the Third Age Trust for the mailing of our magazine Third Age Matters. All this and dealing with a constant stream of queries from members.

U3A in Britain has always been a self learning organisation, so I want to turn next to our study and interest groups which are the major way we deliver learning. We currently have 75 groups, most of which meet monthly. During the year four new groups started: Flower Arranging, Bridge for Beginners, Old Grumpies and Racketball, and two, Gardening and Wednesday Walking, restarted. Mah Jong is making progress. Two, Heraldry and Memory are courses which run occasionally according to demand. At least four others are under discussion. Only two groups, Italian for Beginners and Industrial Heritage 2 were lost this year.

Our 'Study and Interest Groups Booklet' was updated this summer and all new members and those rejoining received a copy. The number of groups and details of the coordinators do change so a hard copy will always become out of date: to overcome this problem we regularly update the list of groups and coordinators on our website. The group showcase is the annual Group Fair held in November; as usual this was very well attended and provided a good opportunity for new members to get first hand information about group activities. It is also a chance for existing members to consider alternative groups.

Recently we held a meeting for coordinators which gave us a chance to talk about current organisation and the information they need to run their groups effectively. Our group liaison officer, Kay Lunt, has put a lot of time and effort into dealing with queries about groups and particularly working with possible new ones so our thanks are due to Kay. Thanks are also due to all the group coordinators; you are doing a wonderful job and without it groups would fail.

The Tuesday and Thursday meetings continue to be well attended, often with over 200 on Tuesdays and 50 -100 on Thursdays. Our thanks go to Sue Kettle, Jeni and Bob Davies, and Myra Bowyer for arranging the content of these interesting , informative and enjoyable meetings. Myra deserves a special mention as she has been organising the Thursday meetings for a number of years and will finally give up at Christmas this year. Our vice chairmen, Brian Holyoak and Gordon Bowyer have ensured that the hall is prepared for these meetings with a team of helpers. The Thursday meetings enable us to offer members assistance with computer problems: this has proved popular and we are seeing a rise in queries relating to tablets. Both meetings continue to provide good opportunities for social interaction with other members. They are also attended by the social events team so that members can book trips out.

A number of our members live alone and for them the social interaction in our activities is particularly important. It is well recognised that maintaining contact with other people is an important contributor to maintaining good mental health as we get older. We continue to provide opportunities for these contacts through our groups, our monthly meetings and our social programme. Our social team has run about twenty seven trips this year. Theatres, concerts, museums and historic sites are just some of the attractions. Special trips were five days in Whitby and seven in Northern Italy. Our thanks are due to Elizabeth Flanagan and her team for these popular activities. This year the team has worked to add some more male oriented trips by recruiting Gerry Weatherstone to the team.

Members of our U3A have taken part in network, regional and national U3A events. These include AGMs at all three levels, regional seminars on U3A growth and web design and a network literature event. Andrew Cross is now chairman of the Wirral and Deeside Network and Jenny Carley is Trustee for the NW Region on the Executive Committee of the Third Age Trust. This raises the profile of Chester U3A and keeps us in touch with new developments.

Our primary method of communication with members is still the monthly newsletters which are available through the monthly meetings, groups and downloading from our website. This provides a steady flow of information. We are also making more use of email although we fully appreciate that this is not suitable for everybody. John Hammond, Ken Bramham and the News Sheet editors have worked hard to provide this service.

All these activities are overseen by your executive committee whose work often goes unseen. This particularly true for our Treasurer Elizabeth Kevan and her team of helpers and our secretaries Nicolette Richardson and Joyce Carrington. Without that work our U3A would collapse quite quickly. Two members, Sue Kettle and Mavis Evans left us during the year and two more, Joyce Carrington and Gordon Bowyer, are resigning today. Their contributions have been much appreciated.

There are many other members who help us in all sorts of ways, such as setting out chairs, maintaining notice boards, greeting people, manning help desks, organising tea and coffee, running the book swap and organising Christmas lunches. It is not possible to list them all but we are very grateful for this help so freely given.

Finally I must comment on the retirement of Gordon. He was first elected in 1999 and served for eleven and a half of the following fifteen years. During this time he has been Chairman, Treasurer and Vice chairman as well as a committee member. The number of duties he has continued to do is so large that we are still working out how many people we need replace him. This is an outstanding record of service and we are greatly indebted to him. That concludes my report.

Godfrey Harrap, November 2014