



Chester U3A

Annual Report 2014/15



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 962, a small increase of 14 over the previous year. This is the sixth successive year of increase in membership. Last year we had 132 new members. There were losses as well, which accounts for the low overall increase in the 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 year several of our members have worked together to develop a new membership database which has increased the capacity of our record keeping and allows us to automatically generate the outputs needed by the Inland Revenue for Gift Aid income and the Third Age Trust for the mailing of our magazine Third age Matters. Both of these bodies require this information via the internet. Our membership secretary, Patricia Gifford and her team of helpers, do a tremendous amount of work very effectively. This includes maintaining the membership database, dealing with membership renewal, new membership applications and a constant stream of queries from members. We are very grateful to them for all that work

Self-help learning groups continue to be the major way we deliver learning. We currently have 81 groups, many of which meet monthly. An analysis of the membership of our groups showed that two thirds of our members were in groups with about half of those in just one group and a quarter in two. This year we established groups in five new areas, Flower Arranging, Mosaic Making, Social Justice, Opera Appreciation and Line Dancing. Second groups were formed for cycling and current affairs. Only Wild Flowers was lost this year. Although we give all members a new 'Study and Interest Groups Booklet' each year, there are often changes and the most up to date information is provided on our website. For those without access to the internet changes are made available in paper copies of the monthly News Sheet. 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 50-80 on Thursdays. Our thanks go to Jeni and Bob Davies, and Jane Harrap for arranging the content of these interesting, informative and enjoyable meetings.

The Thursday meetings now have a greater emphasis on social interaction with tables and informal seating and more group participation. We had great contributions from Story Telling, Play Reading and bird watching, painting and photography groups. Assistance with computer and tablet problems and book swaps has continued. The well attended annual Group Fair held in November provided a good opportunity for new and existing members to get first hand information about group activities.

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 six trips this year. Theatres, concerts, museums and historic sites are just some of the attractions. Special trips were four days in Eastbourne and eight in Tossa de Mar. Our thanks are due to Elizabeth Flanagan and her team for these popular activities.

This year your committee has produced a disability policy and Joyce Carrington has become our disability officer. Members of our U3A have taken part in network, regional and national U3A activities. These include AGMs at all three levels and regional and network seminars and events. Andrew Cross is 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.

Communication with members has continued through the monthly newsletters, available electronically and in paper copy, our website and the monthly meetings where projected rolling notices are provided by Graham Proctor. We are also making more use of email. John Hammond, Ken Bramham and the News Sheet editors Barbara Ginty and Joyce Carrington have worked hard to provide this service.

All these activities are overseen by your executive committee whose work often goes unseen. This is particularly true for our Treasurer Elizabeth Kevan with her assistant Peter Sumption and our secretaries Nicolette Richardson and Angela Tindall. Without that work our U3A would collapse quite quickly. This year three officers, chairman, vice chairman and business secretary and three committee members complete their term of office. Two of these members Patricia and Ken are seeking re-election today. Nicolette and John have both served on the committee for six years while Brian Holyoak has done ten. This is outstanding service and their contributions are 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.

Godfrey Harrap
Chairman Chester U3A