

H and R U3A Chairman's Report 2016

Preparing for the AGM is a time for reflection, a time to look back and take stock. It also provides an opportunity to pay tribute to the work of you, the members of Higham and Rushden U3A, your Group Leaders and your Committee. And this year there seems to be a lot to comment upon.

Membership continues to rise steadily and it stands at 603 as at the end of September. And we have just issued membership number 1,000. There are always some people who do not renew their membership, for example they move away from the area but this year we lost some members who will be sadly missed for their contribution to the running of our U3A.

Committee: Your Committee continues to manage the affairs of HandR U3A and I hope you are satisfied with how things are run and organised. And at this AGM we complete the transformation of the Committee to bring its membership into line with the Constitution following its revision in the Spring of 2015. At this point it falls upon me to make special mention of certain individuals who are standing down this year.

I will start with Pat Bird, Membership No 6, who is stepping down after many years of service. As many of you will know Pat has not been well and is unable to be with us this afternoon. Thus I will not be embarrassing her by saying that she was a member of the original Steering Committee back in 2009 and was Treasurer for a number of years. But Pat's real value has been her wide circle of contacts within the local community which have proved invaluable on many occasions.

Brian Rider, Membership No 10, is also stepping down after many years looking after the sound equipment and helping with the smooth running of our monthly meetings here at the Pemberton Centre.

I also wish to pay special thanks to Margaret Shelton (Membership No 111) who has served on the Committee for many years. Margaret served as Vice Chair and was of great help to Chris Holden during her time as Chairman and in particular when Chris's husband died. Chris has asked that I pass on her own thanks to Margaret. Margaret has been Speaker Secretary for many years. She has left no stone unturned in her efforts to provide us with interesting and informative speakers each month. I think the role of Speaker Secretary is one that is often overlooked and under-appreciated. We have all benefited from the tremendous amount of work by Margaret (and also Brian!). You have our thanks.

Next, I wish to thank Peter Turner. Peter has been Membership Secretary for a number of years. This is one of the more demanding Committee jobs that requires attention throughout the year but places a special burden on the job holder at renewal time. Peter's administrative skills have been invaluable and he is passing on the role in fine form, with systems in place to make the task as slick as it can be. Thank you. Peter has said he will remain Newsletter Editor, working outside but alongside the Committee.

We are also saying farewell to Martyn Penney, our Groups Coordinator. Martyn is a true "people person" and has been a real link between the more formal work of the committee and the touchy feely work of keeping the Group Leaders happy!

Finally, thanks to Ann Harris. Ann beavers away quietly in the background, helping the Groups Coordinator, looking after signing in and a number of other unglamorous jobs.

Thank you all for your help and contribution to the smooth running of Higham and Rushden U3A. But before you leave the stage, on behalf of the Committee and the members I want to show our appreciation of your efforts.

The Committee has also been supported by you, the Membership because we have been able to find people to step forward and take on these jobs. Thank you to Jessica Walker, who has taken

over as Membership Secretary, Angela Mason, who has become Speaker Secretary and Vice Chair and Jenny Carr who is joining the Committee to become the Groups Coordinator.

Groups: The number of Groups now stands at over 40 - the number has been gradually rising and we have formed some new Groups this year: for example, beading, fly tying, Spanish has resumed/restarted and I am determined to get the Film Group up and running this autumn! At this point I would like to pass on the thanks of the Committee to all Group Leaders without whom there would be no Interest Groups

The Committee has formed an Events sub-committee in order to manage the arrangements for events and activities such as trips that do not fall under any specific subject heading or at attached to any Interest Group.

Charity status: This was something that was a necessary evil. Our continued growth meant that we had passed the threshold for what are known as small charities. We could no longer remain under the umbrella of the National U3A. As from December 2015 we became a registered charity, have our own unique number and must use it on all paperwork and correspondence. This also means that we must make an annual return to the Charity Commission.

Lottery Funding: We successfully applied for Lottery Funding and received a little over £4,000. We have already spent some of this on a laptop and equipment for the Membership Secretary in order to make her job as smooth and slick as possible. We are in the process of purchasing a new digital projector that will be used by the Digital Photography Group. And other equipment is being considered.

Gift Aid: We collected declarations from members at renewal in 2015. A total of 217, around 36% of our membership agreed to the collection of Gift Aid. Our application seems to have been hit by delays but we have received confirmation that it has been accepted and we await the money which will make a useful addition to our funds. We will let you know exactly how much is received in due course.

Website: We have been fortunate to have the help and support of Alan Bailey who has been our Webmaster for many years. But we have been able to make use of the skills and expertise of two new members - Jim and Maggie Morrison who have together given our website a makeover. I want to say how much the Committee and I appreciate their efforts - Thank you both. Our new website has been up and running for some weeks. Having been away (again) I have not had much opportunity to investigate, but I hope that those of you who have visited the site have found it refreshingly new and better laid out. But remember, it is your website - it will be as good as the material that you put on it!

Looking forward we have the Tea Party event in just a couple of weeks. This is an opportunity for all members to enjoy a simple social event to celebrate all that we do. Please encourage any members that you know who do not regularly attend the monthly meetings to come along and share in our success.

And finally, I remind you that the ethos of U3A is that it is run by the members for the members. So, if there is anything that you would like, an activity you would like to enjoy, speak out, let us know. But remember, you may be asked to organise it! The Committee is here to help, to facilitate, to try and ensure things happen but we can't do everything.