

BEESTON U3A CHAIR'S REPORT AGM MAY 2016

Good morning everyone. I am delighted to welcome you to our 5th AGM

May 2016 is quite a milestone for Beeston U3A as it reaches its 5th birthday. The group continues to thrive with the membership increasing every month. It is hard to give a definitive number of members because we are in the middle of the renewal process but we were nearing 600 in 2015-2016 so we will probably head towards 700 this year. We are celebrating with a special afternoon tea on May 20th. We hope you will join us. Our special guests will be the original steering committee who put in the time and effort to establish Beeston U3A and without them we most probably wouldn't be here now. I think we should be proud of the fact that we are part of a national organisation with over 365,000 members in 993 U3A's and this of course, is forever increasing.

The past year has been very successful on many counts. We now have 46 interest groups with second groups being set up for table tennis, Latin, book group, and wine tasting. We are also starting a 'Singing for Fun' group and already have 47 people signed up. We remain eternally grateful to our fantastic group leaders/teams who work tirelessly to ensure the success of their groups. Several groups have moved towards shared leadership which we applaud as the load is spread. A good example of this is the reformed history group which is now run very successfully by a team of people.

Several other new groups have been established this year. These include

- Murder book group
- Scottish country dancing -a taster which we hope will be repeated.
- Let's right Shakespeare
- Come Painting although this group hasn't lasted

Over the past year the committee has been working from a Beeston U3A action plan which was put together last June. One of the main development points identified was to try to establish links with local educational establishments for mutual support. Several members requested a computer group and Steve Austin has established a link with Central College. Students are willing to provide one to one tuition on laptops, phones, ipads etc. We hope this will go ahead if we have sufficient interest. We are also trying to establish links with the University of Nottingham. Initial meetings have taken place and although progress is quite slow we are still hopeful that this

will happen. Big thank you to Steve Austin and Richard Eddleston who are working on this project.

In January we held a very successful Group Leaders meeting. A thank you buffet lunch was provided followed by discussions on all manner of general issues to do with leading a group and also planning for the Group Fair which was held in March. The Group Fair which followed was one of our most successful events which was praised by many of you. Group leaders put in time and effort and thought very creatively about how they could promote their groups and there was a wonderful buzz as I walked round. Much of the initial organisation was done by Marie Potts so a big thank you to her. As a consequence we got over thirty new members and many existing members signed up for new groups.

Several groups have made requests for financial support to buy equipment/subscriptions etc. We welcome these requests and the committee are keen to support them whenever possible. Examples of this include a donation of £100 to the Pearson Centre (used by our table tennis and badminton groups) towards a new table tennis table and new card tables for the bridge group.

All groups are very active and a number have arranged visits to places of interest. A few examples include a fascinating Art History visit to The Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham and many Art Gallery visits which have included The Nottingham Contemporary, Djanogly gallery, Southwell and Lincoln. Some members of the Wine Appreciation Group joined members of the Nottingham Wine tasting Group and visited the Burgundy region of France. In June several members will be going on a similar trip to Italy. An Art History trip to Florence is being organised for 2017. The Theatre Visit group is very popular and there have been numerous visits to a variety of local theatres. The Garden visits group enjoyed several day trips during 2015 but the highlight of them all was their three day trip to Norfolk. They visited The Vicarage Garden at East Ruston and the Plantation Garden near the Norwich Roman Catholic Cathedral. Their next stop was an unforgettable afternoon in Will Giles Exotic Garden. He had established this over many years transforming a precipitous piece of land into a garden as exotic as its name. The next main trip is to Wales from the 3-5th June.

Once again Lucy Beardsley has organised a number of excellent outings. These include visits to Highclere, Bletchley Park, Birmingham Tattoo, Tour of the Globe Theatre, Elgar's birthplace and Spetchley Gardens.

Thanks also to Lucy we continue to have an excellent variety of speakers. Charles Hanson the auctioneer was particularly memorable and so was Dorothy O'Brien who touched our hearts when she spoke about her close connections with a remote village in Nepal which was destroyed in the earthquake. A collection at the end of the talk raised an amazing £458 for the village.

Several other events have been well supported and enjoyed by members. In September we held a Macmillan coffee afternoon raising over £600 and a Quiz evening in November. We also celebrated Christmas with entertainment provided by the ukulele and play reading groups, a choir from Chilwell School and festive refreshments. We have a Fine Wine Tasting evening planned for October.

At Christmas we also held a thank you coffee morning at The White Lion for all our volunteers who give their time so willingly. The Open Meetings wouldn't run nearly as smoothly without you and we are very grateful for the help we receive.

Members of the committee have represented you at regional and national meetings/conferences. We all try to keep up to date with changes to policy and to pass this information on to you. This year the National Conference is in Nottingham again and we hope some members and committee members will attend. Details are on the U3A website.

Another development target for us to make members feel valued and to seek your opinions enabling us to strive to make Beeston U3A even better. We have introduced a suggestion box at open meetings for any comments/suggestions you may wish to make. A recent request was asking me to announce the day of the week as well as the day when advertising events etc. This I will strive to do.

In January, we also sent out a questionnaire asking for your views. Response wasn't huge but interesting.

Comments we have received in answer to the question "What do we do well?"

We have a good and dedicated Committee, we provide interesting monthly meetings with a variety of excellent speakers on a variety of topics, in a good and easily accessible venue. We communicate well with members via emails,

newsletter and rolling notices. Most deservedly there was a lot of praise for Marie's excellent newsletters. You think we are friendly and welcoming to both new and existing members and we provide good opportunities for single members to be included in all activities. We have a large number of diverse Interest Groups with knowledgeable Group Leaders and we continue to support the formation of new groups and the maintenance of existing groups

In answer to "What can we do to become even better, the majority of replies were left blank here or members indicated that they couldn't think of anything. One member felt we should look out for loners, which we try to do with our "meeters and greeters" and New Members Corner. Some felt that the comfort break between notices and speakers should be abolished, so we listened, and changed the arrangements. It was pointed out that when Rummikub and Bridge took place on the same day, there were not enough card tables. We have purchased more.

We asked which new groups members would like to see. This resulted in requests for German, Singing for Fun, DIY, Dress Making, Understanding Opera and Computing/IT. I have already mentioned what is happening with some of these groups. The other suggested groups need people to start them. Could this be you? As we have stressed before it's not necessary to be a "Teacher", but just to be part of a team supported by the Committee, to see if these groups can get off the ground. If you think you could be involved with a team in setting up groups for DIY, Dress Making, German conversation or Understanding Opera please let Chris Chater know and we will see what we can do.

Finally, the question of being on the Committee was muted. There was not much response to this question. I will just point out that without a Committee, there will be no U3A! At this point I'd like to say a particular thank you to Malcolm Brookbanks for his excellent work as our treasurer. He is a very astute and helpful committee member and he has tightened up our financial procedures and very much keeps us on the straight and narrow and he will be speaking to you in due course.

Another development point for our U3A was to enable some of you to engage in a Shared Learning Project. We held a Shared Learning event on April 28th and I was delighted when this was attended by 25 members. Guests were Mandy Topp regional representative for shared learning projects and John Down from Grantham U3A who has already led a project. Gill Morral and Caroline Penn also gave presentations and suggested ideas. It already appears that one project will definitely go ahead. This group led by Gill will look at the history of The Grange which is the old police station. We are also hoping that another group will work

with Beeston Civic Society looking at non designated heritage assets ie local buildings or features that are not protected because they are not in conservation areas.

Future developments

- **To continue to extend the number of interest groups**
- **To continue to work to establish links with University of Nottingham for mutual benefit.**
- **To support members in researching shared learning projects.**
- **To provide a range of additional evening social events including those suggested by members.**
- **Continue to keep up to date with local, regional and national U3A initiatives and developments.**
- **To develop understanding of the U3A Beacon system which eventually will allow electronic registration.**

I'd like to thank all our committee members for their dedication and hard work. We are very lucky to have such an amazing group of people who work so hard. Their varied interests and skills makes it a very successful committee.

Lastly I'd like to thank you our members for your interest, enthusiasm and support. I hope you continue to enjoy Beeston U3A and that we will continue to go from strength to strength.

Sue Blackley
May 2016