

## **BEESTON U3A CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2017**

### **Good morning everyone. I am delighted to welcome you to our 6th AGM**

Following the last AGM in May 2016 the year began with a celebration tea party in June for our 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This was attended by around 100 members including the former chairs Sue Cotton and Liz Barnes. Sue Cotton who was the first chair told members how the U3A started in Beeston and she cut the cake. A good time was had by all and I received many emails and letters of thanks saying how much folk had enjoyed it.

Beeston U3A continues to thrive and membership is reaching almost 800. Our numbers are rising each month and we are delighted that our popularity continues to grow as we cater for people in the locality with a wide range of needs and interests.

In order to move our organisation forward we have been working to a development plan compiled by the committee, considering members comments and national and local issues. This plan is regularly reviewed, revised and brought up to date.

A major area for development was to continue to make our U3A vibrant and appealing to all members.

Included in this area is the constant need for more interest groups. We are also trying to start some groups that will be particularly, but not exclusively appealing to men. Chris Chater has worked tirelessly and the past year has been very successful in extending the range of interest groups on offer. We now have 67 interest groups which is an increase of over 20 since the last AGM with second or third groups being set up for table tennis, Latin, ukulele and wine tasting and we are up to our 5<sup>th</sup> book group. We are aware that it is very frustrating for new members if they are constantly told that groups are full and consequently we are working hard to set up additional ones where it is apparent there is a need. This also depends of the goodwill of members being willing to take on the tasks involved in running a group. As a committee, we are pleased that there is a definite move towards team leadership so that the load is shared. We are so grateful for all members who help to run groups. You really are the essence of U3A and without your willingness, hard work and enthusiasm we couldn't exist.

New groups established this year include

- Real Ale
- Singing for fun
- German Beginners and Improvers
- Greek
- Ambling
- Architecture
- Learning to programme
- Mediaeval History
- Singing for fun
- Italian
- Searching Antiques
- Golf
- Needles and Wool.
- Quiz
- Psychology and Sociology

Several new groups are also in the pipeline and these include

Beginners Recorders

5<sup>th</sup> Book Group

2<sup>nd</sup> Medium Walks

Once again, our groups, overall, have been very active and successful and a number have arranged visits to places of interest. We are particularly grateful to Helen Stewart who continues to run four very popular groups. Recently she also organised a very successful visit to Florence for Art History Group members. She has also organised a Beeston U3A creative writing competition. Art Gallery Visit members have had many visits, organised by Barbara Johnson and Nadya Lancaster, which include the Djanogly, Contemporary, Leicester and Harley Galleries. Some members of the Wine Appreciation Group joined members of the Nottingham Wine Group and visited Verona and Venice last June and a similar visit, organised by Piers Krause, is taking place this year. The theatre group continues to be extremely popular and Eve Gurd works very hard organising tickets for productions in local theatres. The Garden visit group led by Sandy Banks have enjoyed several days out and these have included visits to Castle Howard, Southwell Apple Weekend, Cambridge University Botanical Gardens and three days in Cardiff when the group visited six gardens.

Elizabeth le Marchant Brock certainly deserves a mention here as she is the administrator for four groups as well as running the new member's coffee morning and being an ultra-efficient minuting secretary.

Several groups have made requests for financial support to buy equipment/subscriptions etc. We welcome these requests and the committee is keen to support them whenever possible. Examples over the past year of requests that have been granted, include a library subscription for the play reading group, 4 card tables for the Bridge Group and the cost of setting up a website for the Writing for Pleasure Group.

In March, we held our annual group fair enabling group leaders to showcase their groups, recruit new members and gather waiting lists where the groups were already full. A considerable number of visitors attended the event and consequently we gleaned around 30 new members. There was a great buzz around the place and many very positive comments. After the event Group leaders had the opportunity to send comments/suggestions to the committee on possible improvements for next year which we will take on board wherever possible. Much of the preliminary organisation was done by Marie Potts and Celia Billau our new Communications Officer. Consequently, thanks to them the event ran very smoothly.

During the year, we have also held a range of evening social events and these included Fine Wine Tasting led by Piers Krause, a Quiz and an excellent Burns Supper and Ceilidh organised by Janis Patterson.

We celebrated Christmas with seasonal refreshments followed with entertainment by the ukulele and singing for fun groups and an A Cappella male voice choir.

We are always keen to hear the views of members and have recently introduced a forum on our website and opened a Facebook page. These are additional mechanisms whereby members can advertise what they do, share their opinions/ideas and help us to strive to provide what members want.

The annual group leaders meeting was another opportunity for members to make suggestions for improvements. One thing they shared was that some new members find the hustle and bustle a little overwhelming when they come to their first open meeting and so we are trying to find a quieter and calmer place for coffee which is proving quite a challenge and we still haven't found an ideal solution.

Lucy Beardsley ensures that we continue to have a wide range of interesting speakers and particularly notable ones in the past twelve months have been Dr John Dornan, John Wilson and Jane Barnes.

Lucy, ably assisted by Breda Cooper, has also arranged some outstanding visits to places of interest including Hodsock Priory, Lichfield, The Globe, and Highclere Castle where members stayed overnight.

One of our continued development areas is to forge links with local colleges/universities hoping eventually to glean mutual benefits. Despite much effort and willingness this isn't easy. However there have been significant links with Central College. A considerable number of members have attended IT sessions at the College which have been highly successful. We hope this will continue but is currently being hampered by lack of resources at the college. There may be the opportunity for members to attend some IT sessions within our cluster of U3As. These are organised by Stapleford U3A and take place in Stapleford library. Our links with local universities has been slower but certainly not through lack of effort. We are currently in negotiation with Nottingham Trent University and hope we will be involved in two research projects soon. (more details to follow) We hope this will be the beginning of a successful relationship with NTU with benefits on both sides. Steve Austin has been the main contact here assisted by Richard Eddleston. Thanks to them for their continued efforts.

Following on from our study day on Shared Learning projects last April a small group, led by Gill Morral, was set up looking at the history of the old police station. Unfortunately for various reasons the project hasn't continued. I do hope there will be opportunity in the future for more shared learning projects to develop. I would also like us to run some study days with guest speakers and workshops so please let us know if there is a subject you would be interested in and we'll see if we can set something up.

Another priority is to ensure that we stay up to date with local and national U3A initiatives and feed back to you the members. Margot Gale, our Vice Chair and Membership Secretary, attends the Nottinghamshire Network meetings and feeds back information and several committee members have been to local workshops. We were well represented at the National Conference at Nottingham University and Margot and Malcolm gave a very informative presentation about it to members at the October open meeting. Any member

can apply to the committee for sponsorship to attend the conference which includes the AGM. As well as excellent speakers, there is the opportunity to attend workshops and exchange ideas with members of other U3As. It will be held at Nottingham again at the end of August. We also feel it's important to co-operate with the other U3As in our local cluster i.e. Long Eaton, Ilkeston and the latest member Stapleford extending the opportunities that we can provide and learning from and helping each other.

As I say frequently U3A is for the members by the members and one of our aims is to involve more people in the numerous tasks necessary in running a successful U3A. Members are expected to give as well as take. One way we would like members, other than just the committee, to be involved is by establishing working parties and small groups to achieve specific tasks. After attending a workshop at the national conference, we realised that it would be advantageous to many members if we formulated an accessibility policy. Consequently, we set up a working party and were delighted when Anne Pinnock, a non-committee member offered to lead the necessary research. Anne and the other members of the group, in consultation with members and group leaders, have done an excellent job and Anne, who now has an official title of Welfare Officer, will talk to you about the policy at a later meeting and Margot will give you a progress report today.

Another non-committee member Bill Pavlides has also offered to help Chris Chater in her role as group co-ordinator. Now we would like some occasional help for Janis Patterson our event's organiser. Other non-committee members who help enormously are Mike Allery who does numerous IT tasks, Mike Johnson who takes our photographs and Eve Gurd who helps to set up the room for open meetings and looks after the signs we have on the tables. If you feel you could give a little help in any way please please let us know. As well as needing more group leaders we also need more 'Meeters and Greeters' and more people to help with refreshments.

One of our priorities is to make our volunteers feel valued and to let them know that we don't take them for granted. To show our appreciation we held a thank you Christmas coffee morning at the White Lion. We wanted to say a thank you to all the Meeters and Greeters, the folk who sign members in each month and take subscriptions and the members who serve the tea and coffee and other very helpful members who have already been mentioned. A particular thank you here to Elaine Neville who took over the organisation of the refreshments from Sheila Strang.

Our newsletter continues to be of the highest quality thanks to Marie Potts. We are delighted that she has agreed to continue as newsletter editor and to remain on the committee even though she has stepped down as Communications Officer. Please group leaders keep sending Marie reports, photograph etc of your activities. We thank Marie for all her efforts to keep members informed on all kinds of U3A matters and we are grateful that she has worked so closely with Celia Billau ensuring a very smooth transition as Celia takes over from her.

Another significant development is our adoption of the U3A National administration management system called Beacon. This system will computerise all aspects of our administration which becomes more onerous as the membership increases. Eventually there should be the opportunity for annual subscriptions to be recorded and paid on line and the system should be useful for group leaders. Margot, Malcolm and Celia are working very hard to become familiar with all aspects of the system as they are gradually implemented.

The coming year will hopefully see us move further forward as we continue to strive to provide a vibrant and lively U3A.

Developments already identified are

1. To further develop the use of the Beacon system
2. To continue to extend the range of interest groups with a focus on groups which may have male appeal.
3. To encourage members to identify a subject for a study day.
4. To improve all channels of communication as our numbers continue to increase including the use of the Forum, Facebook and a monthly bulletin. We will endeavour to keep you informed about national and local developments and will continue to ask for your opinions/ideas,
5. To prepare for succession planning in readiness for any committee changes in a year's time.
6. To look for ways to encourage more members to take an active role within our U3A.
7. To consider the challenges brought by the ever-increasing membership.

Sadly, several members have passed away during the past year. We miss them and our thoughts are with their families and friends.

The year hasn't been without its challenges but the strength of the team has helped us through.

I'd like to thank you all most sincerely for continuing to be part of Beeston U3A and we look forward to another successful and exciting year.