

When I review what we've achieved in the last year, I'm very encouraged that we continue to be successful and innovative. Our early adoption of the Beacon membership system, which is now used by over half of the country's U3As, meant we have been able to streamline some of our processes and introduce new payment methods such as Direct Debits and online transfers. We've also held our first short break and exercised both our minds and bodies during two barn dances.

None of this would have been possible without the efforts and support of your committee and I'm very grateful that Wendy was prepared to continue as Secretary for another term last year. I'm also delighted that David Scott and Ruth Johnson, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, have agreed to continue. Sandra McDonald took over the reins of the Outings Committee and we've continued to have really interesting and popular outings. Sandra has joined the Group Travel Organisers Association and is full of ideas for further short breaks and holidays. Further thanks must also go to the members of the Outings Committee, Linda Bateup and the tea-rotta team, Jean Bricknell and the meeters and greeters and finally Di Brown and Sue Marsal who organised our delicious Christmas lunch at the Masonic Hall.

Following the formal part of this AGM, we will be putting photographs of all our various activities up on the screen, which will demonstrate just how much we pack in each year. This will include photographs from our outings, groups, other events and our first short break. Many other U3As successfully organise holidays and short breaks and I'm delighted that our U3A has now joined their number. I know that the other 39 members who joined me on our trip to Chester and Liverpool will testify to how interesting and well organised it was. We all learnt so much and enjoyed good food and weather and each other's company.

We re-introduced our subscription fee last September, which triggered more resignations than usual, as members who had moved or were no longer able to be involved were prompted to let us know. Inevitably too, people join and then decide the U3A is not for them. So from just over 1,100 members we reduced to 957. However, since then our membership has continued to increase and we have passed the thousandth mark again. New members hear about us from other members; word of mouth is always such a good recommendation, so please do continue to promote us.

Our groups continue to increase too and we are always grateful for the suggestions and interest shown. New groups that have been introduced this year include Gilbert and Sullivan, Crochet, Craft Beer, London Concerts, a further London Explorers and a Wine Appreciation group and more language groups. We also hope to introduce Folk Singing, Cycling, Bird Watching and a new discussion group soon. Such a varied and interesting range of groups is testament to the vibrancy and experience of our members.

In addition to our groups, we have been involved in several Study Days and seminars and we are very grateful to Adrian Twiner for both his contacts and his efforts in making these so successful. Last autumn's study day on the Middle East was fascinating and was attended by other Kent U3As too.

Normally we would be listening to an interesting speaker at this meeting. Margot Pierson has done an amazing job at providing such a varied and fascinating range of subjects. They've all been great and my personal highlights were the wildlife photographer, the talk on carriage driving (where Antonia divested herself of her outer garments), the story of Shackleton and the talk on Dickens.

In the last few weeks, many of you will have received emails and letters from other organisations about the introduction of the new GDPR. You will know from our newsletters that we are compliant with the new rules. Going forward you will receive renewal forms where you must give your consent for us to hold your contact information.

I have one final piece of U3A business to cover – see item 7 on the Agenda. We are a charity and as such have to fit in with Charity Commission rules. The Charity Commission have requested to National Office that the 'object clause' (i.e. The Charitable Purpose) of U3A Constitutions be altered. It is proposed that our Constitution Point 3 Charitable Purpose be changed to read:

“The advancement of education and, in particular, the education of older people and those who are retired from full time work, by all means including associated activities conducive to learning and personal development.”

This will replace the existing clause

“to advance education and in particular the education of people not in full time gainful employment who are in their Third Age (being the period of time after the first age of childhood dependence and the second age of full time employment and/or parental responsibility) residing in Tunbridge wells and its surrounding locality. For this purpose education includes the development of mental and physical powers”

The Committee are happy with the change and ask members present to ratify the change. A copy of the existing Constitution is available on our website.

Finally, thank you all for coming today and your support throughout the year. I hope that you can join us afterwards for a glass of bubbly and strawberries and cream.

Sue Brimlow
May 2018.