

Tunbridge Wells U3A Chairman's AGM REPORT – Joy Podbury

Nationally U3A has more than 365,000 members attending almost 1,000 branches and is growing at a rate of approximately 7% per year. I was surprised to find, this represents just 3% of those eligible to join the organisation!

Following another successful year, our membership is approaching 950, an increase of almost a third in the last few years. I confidently predict we will reach our 1,000th member before the end of the year and will continue to grow for the foreseeable future.

This has resulted in a substantial increase in our reserves; and whilst this has enabled us to replace tired equipment for the monthly meetings and provide equipment for the groups, National Office have advised the committee to have a single subscription free year for existing members. This would bring the reserves closer to their recommended levels.

It is essential for the health of the organisation we continue to start new groups, we now have more than 90. Our most recent additions include Duplicate Bridge, 4 new language groups, Wine Appreciation, Sewing, and our 4th London Explorers and Pub Lunch groups. Over the last 25 years, many groups have come and gone, but one Organiser has lead his group for the entire 25 years. That person is Lionel Cole; I think you will agree it is a very impressive record!

There is always room for another interest group or another volunteer willing to put something back to keep our U3A growing and vibrant. If you have a suggestion how TW U3A could be improved, or are willing to take on a Committee role, please let us know. Remember it is your U3A you can help shape its future.

There are a number of unsung heroes embodying the spirit of our organisation who often work behind the scenes to make sure that the groups and U3A activities run smoothly. We should all be grateful to them for the sterling work they do. A huge THANK YOU goes to each and every one of our volunteers, there are far too many to mention individually.

Monthly meetings are well attended, over the past year we have had an interesting range of speakers however, I believe the highlight of the 2016 programme is still to come. Our July' speaker is Eric Midwinter, a founder member of the U3A movement.

The outings committee have once again put together an impressive programme of events for us to enjoy. Pat Micklewright' time as Outings Coordinator has come to a close. She has led her team with enthusiasm, often going that extra mile. We are pleased Pat plans to continue as a member of the team.

We have updated some of our publicity material used to advertise and promote TW U3A, so do lookout for the posters. However our most successful source of publicity is you. New members usually tell us they heard about us from one of our members – so please keep up the good work.

John regularly produces our Newsletter, however he needs members to send items of interest, details of group activities and perhaps the odd photo or two. The majority of new members find us via the website, it is our main source of information.

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The introduction of Beacon, a new U3A membership database system has involved the Treasurer in a great deal of work; going forward he believes it will be a huge improvement on our existing system.

Alison Grace has completed her term of office however, she plans to take on the role of Vice Chairman.

Di Brown has been a member of the committee for some considerable time. Originally she took on the task of mailing the newsletter and later became the Membership Secretary, and for the last two years has been our Vice Chairman. Di is the fountain of all knowledge and as you probably are aware an extremely efficient member of the team. It is time for her to take a well-earned rest!

This AGM is my final duty as Chairman, many changes have taken place over the last few years. As we get older change is not always easy to accept, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every member of the committee, both past and present for their commitment. We are now seen as a friendly and vibrant U3A, offering our members an enormous range of activities. Yet, at the same time, we have managed to streamline a number of our processes thus reducing the committees' workload. Not a bad achievement for an expanding organisation.

This year we plan to continue to celebrate our 25th Anniversary in a number of ways. These events will give members the opportunity to get together, chat, renew old acquaintances and make new friends. Our thanks goes to the people, who 25 years ago, had the vision, drive and commitment to start a U3A in Tunbridge Wells, we look forward to celebrating the Golden Anniversary!