

Chairman's Report – 2014/15

Willem Wiechers

It is normal to review the progress that has been made during the last year, and I will do so now. I will start with last year's AGM. Members may remember that we had a very tricky situation because of the problems with our constitution. The quorum requirements were resolved at the SGM before the AGM and a validly elected executive committee was voted in at the AGM governed by our original 2004 constitution.

Most probably because of my role in resolving the various problems that had occurred before, I was elected Chairman of the new committee. I had never expected to take on this role but was willing to do my best.

At first it was difficult to find people to take on the various officer roles. My special thanks therefore to Pauline Jones & Cathleen Barnes who were persuaded to take on the roles of Secretary & Minute Secretary and have given me great support during the year.

A special word of thanks should also go to our Treasurer Bill Watkinson, who gave me great support throughout and for his extensive work on the finances and for sorting out various financial problems. Also of course to the other members of the committee for all the work they put in.

One of our first tasks was to implement the resolutions passed at the AGM regarding trustees. A working party was duly appointed with Geoff Maitland as chair to make recommendations on the setting up of a trustee body. They produced a report in late November 2014, which is still available on the web site for you to read. The executive committee accepted their report unanimously but then had considerable trouble in incorporating it into a new constitution. Discussions on the constitution were very protracted as it was difficult to find common ground on who should run the U3A (trustees or executive). However, the constitution has now been completed. Last week it was sent to the Charity Commission and Third Age Trust for comments. Depending on the outcome of this, a special general meeting will most probably be held in the autumn for the membership to vote on the new constitution. A 2/3 majority at that meeting is needed for its adoption. If it is adopted, another SGM or AGM will then be necessary to implement it. Special thanks here to our membership secretary, Ian Haskell who had the unenviable job of incorporating the working party recommendations, and its various interpretations, into the constitution. We went through much, before we could get a final agreement on the wording.

I come to my own position now. It has been normal for the chairman to be appointed for a 2 year term, and it was my intention to serve for that length of time. However, in our 2004

constitution it is also stated that no member of the committee shall serve for more than 6 years. I recently realised that while I have only been an elected member for 5 years I had already been co-opted for a year previous to my first election. I have thus now completed 6 years in total and have come to the end of my eligibility to be on the committee. I can therefore no longer continue as Chairman after this AGM. The new executive will elect someone else at its first meeting to chair the U3A from then on.

Other members retiring from the committee after 6 years of committed service are Alex McMinn, one of the founders of our U3A, Dorothy Harrison, Bernie Hanford and Bill Evans. Idris Williams has also decided to retire. Our thanks go to them all.

Last year, especially at the SGM and AGM it became obvious to me that the membership felt that the Executive Committee had grown remote and wasn't listening to them. My first aim therefore this year was to make the executive more open and responsive to the wishes of the membership. Whenever an issue was raised it was fully discussed and feedback given as soon as it was reasonably possible.

Communications with the membership have been greatly improved. Apart from our magazine & website we have the monthly e-news bulletin which informs members of special events, changes to the published program and other matters of interest. I have also used the bulletin to communicate important news items to members directly. More information about the executive committee and how it operates is now published on the web-site including the committee minutes, job descriptions for the officers, and also the standing orders, ably written by Sue Watkinson, for the AGM. We also have photographs of all the committee members. All the AGM reports will also be available on the website. This should make the process of how the U3A is run, and who is doing what, far more transparent.

We have a very successful U3A with over 1950 members at the end of this year, able to partake in over 80 different activities. The variety we offer keeps on expanding. Just recently two new groups were formed, German & Recorders. A sign of a healthy U3A is the formation of new groups, so keep on coming up with new ideas. Sometimes a topic is better dealt within a short course. We had quite a few of those as well, and hope to have more in the next year. So thank you to the leaders, coordinators and everybody else who helps to run the groups and for the members who attend to make the groups what they are.

Some groups have leaders who are retiring and new leaders have taken over. I will not mention individual ones because I will inevitably leave someone out but they will know who they are and how much they are appreciated.

We have realised over the years that our U3A plays an important part in the social life of our members even more so for those that have lost their partners. We increasingly try to cater for these needs, realising that social contact is perhaps more important than anything else. I

think especially of Horizons, open group meetings such as the Sunday socials, science group, local history, gardening, computer tutorials etc. where anybody can come along on their own. Similarly concert & theatre outings as well as our trips away, serve this purpose as well. It is these that make our U3A that extra bit special.

Two groups have expanded their activities outside our own U3A. The Memory Course Group continues to be very successful in spreading their course nationwide, and the Musical Theatre Group has also been recognised further afield. I have often heard it said that our U3A is one of the most successful in the country. I think we should take pride and pleasure in this fact, and let us continue to keep it so.

This year I would like to thank people for those ancillary activities which don't normally get mentioned but which are integral to the running of our U3A. The first is our website. This was set up and has been continuously developed by Margaret Wiechers for over 10 years. It now has around 200 pages which have to be updated and maintained. For the last year, Maureen Boumphrey has been editing the group web pages to give MW more time to develop the other features on the web site such as Group Support Procedures, and incorporate standing orders, minutes and all AGM info & reports, and much more.

Then there is the e-newsletter, also set up by Margaret and now ably being edited by Bob Carlton. To keep up to date with social media we also have a Facebook page set up by Brian Bostock. More and more people are looking at this, and also editing it. It is an easy way for members to report or comment on any event or issue.

The magazine produced by Bill Evans is welcomed and read by everyone, but thanks also to Sue Watkinson & Margaret Kitchen who write and edit much of it, and the distributors who make sure you all get it.

A special mention should be made of all the people who help with computer advice and those who put in so much effort in running computer courses. They have helped a large percentage of our membership.

We had many interesting monthly speaker meetings this year. Thanks to Mia Farah for organising these.

Then there is the social group that provides us with refreshments at Horizons and organises social events for the whole U3A, the welcomers who play such an important part in introducing new members to our various activities, and the people who come week after week to Horizons, to deal with membership, finance, outings etc. You are all really appreciated. I should mention Jean Wilding here, who has organised the philharmonic visits for a long time but is now retiring. I hope we have found someone else to take this over.

You may have noticed that I have concentrated this year on mentioning Communications & modern technology areas. This shows that our U3A tries keeps up to date and in line with the modern world.

I haven't been able to mention everyone or group that ought to be thanked. I would leave out half if I tried. So therefore my thanks to everybody that has helped make the U3A what it is.

On a final note, I hope that with the changes introduced it has made things easier for the next committee to work more efficiently and harmoniously.

Thank you.

Willem Wiechers – 7th May 2015