

## **Annual Report from the Chair.**

**Southwell U3A**

**Peter James**

**August 2013**

In August 2012 both the Treasurer and I were new to the posts. So the year has been characterised for me as a period of learning. In general the year for Southwell U3A has been a period of consolidation and steady but limited growth.

Our membership has grown by approximately 8% rising from around 580 to 630. These figures can only be approximate as our membership fluctuates from month to month. In consequence to our rise in membership the number of groups now on offer has risen to 80 across 55 different subject or activity areas.

The groups are the life blood of any U3A and while we are able to offer a large range of learning and activity groups there is always need for more. The 62 group leaders who we have at present are to be praised for their invaluable work over the last year. I am aware that many groups are supported by other volunteers who help the group leaders by taking on tasks such as finance for the group. Our thanks go to them as well. These people provide approximately 210 hours of activity and learning each month for members. Groups vary greatly in size, the smallest having just two or three members to what I believe to be the largest in Southwell, Local History, that has over 50! However, taking the average to be 10 members a group, the group leaders are offering approximately 3.5 hours of learning or activity to every member of our organisation each month. That equates to 42 hours per member each year.

Earlier this year all members were given the opportunity to fill in a questionnaire about our U3A. At the time we had just about 600 members and we received responses from 284 members. As well as answering the standard questions, members were invited to make additional comments on the back of the form. Over 30 people did so.

Looking first at the straightforward questions we see that our male / female split is roughly one third, two thirds. 14% of respondents were over 80 years of age, while only 1% were under 60. Not surprising, perhaps but the general age profile was skewed towards the older end of the spectrum. Looking at the number of groups members attend, we found that 70% of members attend 1,2 or 3 groups. 19% attend 3 or more while a surprising 11% attend no groups at all. 72% of those returning questionnaires attend the monthly meeting nearly always but only 7% never come. These figures are skewed because we know that less than half the membership are ever at the monthly meeting. The question about receiving Newslines by e-mail yielded a 60/40 split against the idea. The invitation to make comments about the monthly meeting had a plethora of responses, but there was overwhelming support for the speakers and the opportunity to meet and socialise with others.

The questionnaire has been most useful to the committee. It has given us some hard facts to use in discussion about some topics. All the comments that were received were recorded and circulated to the committee and they continue to be useful in our deliberations.

Turning now to the social activity of Southwell U3A, I am able to report that this important aspect of education is thriving as well. Many, if not all, of our group activities promote social well being by introducing members to new friends and acquaintances. Members frequently tell me about the value of this side of our activities and this was a prominent feature of the comments received in questionnaire given to members earlier this year.

The number of day trips to places of interest has slowly been increasing over the years. There have been nine outings (August 2012 – July 2013) to such diverse places as The National Stud at Newmarket, Whightwick Manor and The Houses of Parliament. There are several more planned visits for the remainder of 2013. These events are all carefully planned and managed by a Social Committee who work very hard to ensure that the outings run smoothly. It is an onerous task to fill a 53 seater coach, collect the money and pay all the bills that ensue. All this, as well as checking the people who go and ensuring they have their emergency details to hand. Our thanks go to this hard working and dedicated team of people.

Increasingly, as groups become more established and group leaders become more confident, we are witnessing the growth of day visits by individual study groups. This has greatly enhanced this important aspect of our U3A as often there are spare seats available for those who are not part of the group but would like to go to that particular destination. Extended visits have been made by a couple of groups where members have booked accommodation so that they can spend longer at the venue or can travel further afield.

Earlier this year, Roger Bennett organised a pilot outing to Nottingham Concert Hall to one of the series of concerts put on at this venue. This is in the expectation that he will be able to organise a full programme next year.

Newsline is the central communication agent of Southwell U3A and is the means by which group leaders, trip organisers and others can show what is on offer. It is a key part of the organisation and has continued to offer good service to all members in the past year. Apart from the editorial team who give many hours each month compiling the magazine, there is an army of others who put inserts into individual copies, organise the collection of the printing, lay out copies at monthly meeting or deliver those not collected. Our thanks go to these members who are willing to give up their time and energy.

Monthly Meetings continue to be popular with a large number of members. These are primarily to organise our U3A. However the opportunity to meet others and then listen to the excellent speakers is popular with members who attend. Our programme of speakers has been varied and we thank our speaker seeker for her dedicated work. Towards the end of the year we invested in a new PA system, with four speakers. This has enhanced the acoustics of the event and our thanks go to Roger Bennett and Terry Pearce for their hard work in obtaining and setting up this new system. Many members help with this monthly event and our thanks go to all who help in any way.

Financial organisation is a key aspect of any U3A. Our new treasurer, Howard Godfrey has done sterling work during the past year to meet the demands made by

the charity commissioners and our external examiner. His work has been ably supported by the social committee treasure, Sue Bains. More recently we have been able to open a separate account for money being handled by groups and we are indebted to John Elkington for taking charge of this account.

During the past year the committee has had to make many decisions that affect the way that our U3A is run and organised. I can say that without exception, all the committee have been supportive and helpful at all times. Your committee are a dedicated and hard working group of people who accept the responsibility of being a trustee for the organisation without complaint. To list each of them and their responsibilities would be tedious. Suffice to say that on your behalf I thank them all for the work that they have done in their respective areas over the last twelve months. Additionally, I thank them all for the support they have given me in my first year as chair. Two long standing members of the committee are standing down this year. Roger Bennett, who has been serving since Feb. 2006 and Celia Dunkley who joined the committee in June 2006 and has been the group co-ordinator for the last five years are both giving way to new blood. We thank them for their hard work and organisational abilities during this last year and in previous years. Mary Perry was seconded to the committee earlier this year in order to take on the role of group coordinator.

Last December the committee organised an event for those who help in any way in our U3A. Over 150 invites were sent out and many of these people attended a 'get together' in Southwell Library. It is a symptom of our U3A that so many people help in ways big and small. This is what makes us successful and I feel that I am able to report that Southwell U3A is flourishing and thriving. I am proud to be the Chair of such an organisation and I ask you to adopt this as our annual report.