

REPORT FROM THE TRUSTEES OF SEVENOAKS U3A - 2020

This report to the Sevenoaks U3A membership complies with the requirements of the Charity Commission and the Third Age Trust.

Organisation

Sevenoaks U3A is charity registered with the Charity Commission. The Executive Committee (EC) currently consists of 10 members all of whom are trustees of the charity. The EC is supported by a number of sub-committees covering specific areas.

Philosophy of Sevenoaks U3A

Our U3A is a learning cooperative. Our success depends on members contributing in some way by participating in groups, open meetings and trips and, where possible, by putting something back into our U3A. There are many ways in which members can make a contribution, large or small, by volunteering to help or by joining a committee or sub-committee. We encourage everyone to contribute in some way. It is also a good way to make new friends.

Group Activities

Thanks to the dedication and hard work of the Group Organisers and the contributions of our members, our study and activity groups continue to flourish. Some of our Group meetings are open to all and cover such subjects as Science, Computers, Table Tennis, Bridge, Cycling and Walking. For the first 24 years of our existence our monthly open meetings took place in the Community Centre at Bat & Ball, but following a decision by the Town Council to rebuild that centre we moved to St Nicholas Church. It is hoped that the re-built Community Centre will be available for us in January 2021. In March of this year all of our group events were suspended as a result of the lockdown. We currently offer nearly 100 groups, although there has been a small reduction in the number during the year. We are always keen to support members willing to start new groups. This year's handbook will be in a new format with groups listed under categories which should be easier to follow.

Other U3As

The EC has decided to allow group organisers to permit members of other U3As to join their groups without the need to pay a second subscription. If vacancies are limited our own members will always take precedence. We have decided not to proceed with a request by Knole and Westerham U3As for a formal agreement to participate in each other's groups. That is largely because there are currently members of ten other U3As who participate in our groups and we do not want to treat any of them differently.

Social Events

The programme of events got off to a good start with visits to Rotherhithe, Kew and Brick Lane in the last months of 2019, followed by a theatre trip in January. The festive lunch at Wildernesse Golf Club on 21 February went ahead as planned, but after that the country went into lockdown and a wide range of events including a holiday to South Wales and the Wye Valley all had to be cancelled.

Study Day

Along with so many events, the Science Seminar on Plastics Pollution due to be held on 3 June had to be cancelled.

Membership

After growing rapidly for more than 20 years to achieve a membership of just over 1,000, our membership has fallen slightly. This is a trend common to most U3As throughout the country. We are anxious to attract new members to maintain the high standard of the activities that we offer to the membership. With a view to raising our profile and attracting new members we have produced publicity leaflets and we are experimenting with social media. In addition to bi-annual coffee mornings for new members, we have started a programme of informal meetings open to all members. These normally take place at Miller & Carter in Riverhead from 10.30am on the first Monday of each month, though they have been suspended for the duration of the lockdown.

Beacon Membership Database

In common with many U3As throughout the country we have adopted the Beacon database system. This provides a fast and efficient way of monitoring our membership and accounts. It is also a highly efficient way of circulating information to our members, but that depends on having up-to-date email addresses.

Finance

Our accounts for the year continue to be healthy as is shown in the Report & Accounts for 2019-2020. Our Executive Committee is committed to ensuring that our U3A is run as efficiently as possible for the benefit of all of our members. Our financial reserves policy is to have a minimum reserve of £8,000 to allow for a drop in income or unexpected costs. Our cash balance at the financial year end was £16,107. We have deliberately built reserves to avoid the need to increase subscriptions. We were expecting to have a small deficit in this and subsequent years while maintaining our reserves at an acceptable level. Savings during the lockdown will though have the effect of reducing the deficit for this year. We anticipate reaching our minimum reserve of £8,000 in 2023-2025 at which time it may be necessary to increase subscriptions by a small amount.

Communications

Most members now receive newsletters by email. They can also be downloaded from the website. Those members who choose to receive newsletter by post receive a black & white copy which arrives a few days later. Our website, which is being constantly updated, is the main conduit for membership enquiries. In addition, all Executive Committee meeting minutes and newsletters are posted on the website.

Conclusion

Thanks are due to all of our members for keeping our U3A vibrant. Even though our activities have been seriously curtailed for much of the year some groups have managed to hold virtual meetings, and we look forward to resuming our many activities with added enthusiasm once the crisis is over.

Nick White, Chairman
June 2020