



2021 REPORT FROM THE TRUSTEES OF SEVENOAKS U3A

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 9 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, by joining a committee or sub-committee or contributing to the activities of one or more of our groups. We encourage everyone to contribute in some way. It is also a good way to make new friends.

Group Activities

All of our activities have been seriously affected by the government-imposed lockdown throughout the year. At the time of writing all restrictions are scheduled to end on 21st June, but there will be some members who still feel nervous about resuming their previous activities and engaging in new ones. Many of our groups have been able to conduct successful meetings on Zoom. That facility has also been used to good effect for monthly meetings, and for the science and computer groups, which are open to all members. Zoom has had the unexpected benefit of making some group meetings accessible to members who do not belong to a particular group. A military history talk that would normally have been delivered to no more than ten members reached an audience of more than a hundred. Some of our monthly meetings on Zoom have attracted more members than ones with live audiences. Even though Zoom is an amazing tool, it is no substitute for face-to-face meetings, especially for new members. Outdoor groups such as walking and cycling have been able to resume earlier than those that meet indoors. The rebuilding of the Community Centre at Bat & Ball, where our meetings were held for the first 24 years of our existence, is now complete and we will start using it again as soon as we are able to do so. We currently offer more than 90 groups. Although some groups have closed, we have been able to start new ones for Nordic Walking and London Villages despite the lockdown. We are always keen to support members willing to start new groups. Anyone thinking of starting a new group, and the possibilities are endless, is welcome to discuss their ideas with the Group Development EC member: groupdev@sevenoaksu3a.org.uk. The current handbook, which is in a new format with topics arranged in sections, has proved popular. The next edition will take account of members' comments to make further improvements.

Social Events

We have a very enthusiastic social events committee which had a full programme scheduled for the year just ending. Unfortunately, none of those events could take place, but they are being re-scheduled and will go ahead at the earliest opportunity. Pam Walshe is standing down as the EC member for social events after many years of excellent service. Joyce Allen is standing for election as her replacement.

Study Days

Due to the pandemic, we have not been able to hold any study days this year. They included a Science Committee event planned for June. Many of our members were however able to participate in a successful Zoom event on Climate Change organised by Paddock Wood u3a on 17th March which had a number of high-profile speakers. There are already plans for our science committee to run an event in June 2022.

Membership

In March our membership stood at 871. That reflects a reduction, which is understandable given the restrictions that we have had to live with. The great majority of our members have though remained with us despite the effects of the lockdown. We have been advertising on village noticeboards and in the local press and are hopeful that we will be able to attract more recently-retired members once we are able to meet again. In normal times, we invite all new members to attend coffee mornings which introduce them to our activities, and allow us to make use of their skills. In addition to coffee mornings for new members, we intend to re-start our programme of informal meetings, open to all members, at Miller & Carter in Riverhead, starting at 10.30am on the first Monday of each month. We only managed two of those before they were suspended by the lockdown, but they were proving very popular and, after contributions from those attending, the costs were very small.

Beacon Membership Database

Beacon is proving to be an excellent way of monitoring our membership and accounts. It also allows us to send messages to all of those members whose email addresses we hold. We regularly discover that members have changed their email addresses. It is therefore important for all members to ensure that we have their up-to-date email address. Please advise the Membership Secretary of any changes membership@sevenoaksu3a.org.uk.

Finance

The annual accounts show a significant increase in funds at year end when the General Fund stood at £22,184 (2020: £16,107). This is largely explained by: 1) due to a timing change by the Third Age Trust there was no Capitation Fee charged in the year; this is likely to be approximately £3,000, 2) the various government lockdowns meant that monthly meetings in person have not taken place for the whole year & hence we have incurred no costs for hiring premises or catering. To partly offset this saving we have invested in IT software to enable us to hold virtual meetings using 'Zoom' – for the monthly meeting as well as groups – & electronic voting for the survey & general meetings. Although membership subscriptions have fallen, our income has been supplemented by the sale of calendars generating a small surplus which was not budgeted & the transfer of funds from the Arts & Drama group who closed their account. During the year the executive committee have prepared a detailed Finance Policy designed to clarify how we manage our finances and to guide the trustees and our groups in managing their funds and with the aim of being open & transparent in how we handle all our u3a funds. The policy was developed on a Third Age Trust template which was no doubt introduced with recent high profile charity failures in mind. The policy will be published shortly & will be available on our web site at www.sevenoaksu3a.org.uk.

Communications

Most members now receive newsletters by email. They can also be downloaded from the website. Those members who choose to receive their newsletter by post receive a black & white copy which arrives a few days later than the colour email version. Our website, which is being constantly updated, is the main conduit for membership enquiries. In addition, apart from occasional confidential information, all EC meeting minutes as well as newsletters are posted on the website.

Conclusion

Nick White is due to stand down as chairman at the AGM on 23rd June. All members of the EC have worked extremely hard under difficult conditions during the year. All except for the chairman and social events member, are planning to continue, and we have nominations for the three vacant posts, including that of vice-chairman.

Trustees, Sevenoaks u3a
May 2021