

AGM of the Dawlish & District u3a

Chair's Report

19th September 2022

I suppose it was to be expected that the past year would not be plain sailing, and so it has proved. It was no surprise that a resurgence of Covid infections would lead to renewed restrictions on meeting together, but I did not anticipate that we might need to cancel a meeting because of extreme heat. Climate change campaigners will probably wonder why this came as a surprise. Despite these interruptions, it has been such a pleasure and relief to be able to meet again to a large extent without the anxiety with which we became so familiar over the previous two years.

This time last year, I was able to report to members that we had emerged in good shape from the pandemic, and that following a hugely successful Open Day, our membership had grown substantially to 160, a record level, with continuing interest being shown from potential new members. While our total membership has fallen slightly to 150 by the time of this AGM, we are still substantially above where we were two years ago. As we embark on a new season's activities after a slight change of tempo during the summer, we will need to renew our efforts to raise our profile and build our membership as this should be a never ending task. It is most encouraging to have a steady level of interest from people interested in joining, indeed our Membership Secretary deals with a number of new enquiries most weeks, and that is good for all of us. I know that a lot of our new members and enquiries come from our current members sharing what they do with friends and neighbours, so please do your bit to spread the word.

It is healthy to see a steady evolution in the list of our interest groups. While some groups no longer function or are currently 'resting', other groups have come to the fore. The Adventure Group, Beer and Skittles, Boules, Craft, Painting & Drawing, and Grow your Own Groups are relatively new additions to the list, while it is encouraging to see French Conversation attracting new members, the Theatre Group is flourishing as are Art Appreciation, Badminton and our two book groups. Under George Lipscomb's leadership, Natural History is doing great work in St Gregory's church yard and elsewhere in the community. The Discussion Group and Wine Appreciation Group are both forums for lively conversation in their different ways, as are the monthly sessions for Tea & Chat, while Great Lives represented our u3a well at the Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

These are all indications of a lively and creative membership, and the product of the enthusiasm and hard work of our group conveners. Their creative leadership ensures there is a full and enjoyable programme of activities throughout the year, and that all members are actively engaged in what is going on. It is important that all the membership show their appreciation for what they do so willingly and enthusiastically, and that we all offer our practical support to them.

I'd also like to express my considerable thanks to all the members of the Committee – to Michael Heyden who is our Treasurer but in fact is far more than that, to Secretary Pete Thorogood, to Groups Coordinator Barry Baker and our newest member Brenda Butterworth

who is taking the minutes for this AGM while Pete is on holiday. Our indefatigable Membership Secretary Kate McCarthy has worked especially hard in introducing us all to Beacon. Her experience of such management systems has been invaluable – as has her seemingly unlimited patience in dealing with the many minor problems which invariably occur in such a process, and offering the training and technical advice we all need as we make changes of this sort. Now most of us are familiar with how it works and what it offers, Beacon is a valuable tool which improves our efficiency and everyday administration, as well as communications within our groups and across the whole u3a. All these committee members provide excellent support for me as Chair and for our membership and groups throughout the year. In addition, not serving on the Committee but doing great work for us are Dana Dima who produces an excellent newsletter each month, and our webmasters Miggie and Dave Pickton whose technical expertise and experience in communications matters are immensely valuable.

As you may have heard me mention from time to time, we do need more people to put themselves forward to serve on the Committee or to take on other specific roles such as Publicity or Speakers Secretary, which need not entail formal membership of the Committee. It is important to have new people contributing their ideas and experience to the organisation, and we cannot rely on the same people year after year. I can assure you that contributing in this way really is enjoyable and rewarding, so please consider what you can contribute. There is so much talent and experience out there!

The programme of speakers at the past year's monthly meetings has been eclectic to say the least. The programme has included local history, the Vikings, advice on our use of energy in our homes, film music, Oliver Twist (not in person) and the challenges facing local government. Unfortunately, a combination of extreme weather and omicron led to some cancellations. Most of our speakers come to us without any fee, and those who charge, do so at a very modest rate. They have all enriched our programme and given us much to enjoy and to contemplate. In the year ahead, we can look forward to learning about St Petrock's, the organisation which helps street sleepers and homeless people in our community, Dawlish's connections with slave plantations, cybercrime, the Samaritans, social prescribing, the Devon Land Girls, the Devon Gardens Trust and Exeter City FC. I try to invite speakers who can appeal to a wide range of interest but inevitably there is an element of chance in whom I invite. I often respond to suggestions from members, or from chance encounters, so if you do come across a speaker or an organisation that you think might be of interest – and won't charge a large fee! – then please let me know.

So, we have enjoyed a good year and there is much to look forward to in the year ahead. We are an organisation whose core ethos is about members contributing, sharing their enthusiasm, experience, expertise and zest for life, and there is plenty of evidence in the past year to show this happening. I look forward to our u3a continuing to develop and grow in the year ahead, and to us embracing our strap line of *Learning, Laughing, Living*.

John Vick

16th August 2022