

## Flintshire U3A Annual General Meeting – 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2017

### Membership Secretary's Report

I became Membership Secretary 2 ½ years ago, taking over from Barry Ashton who had carried out the role for 6 years. The first membership secretaries were Diane Sauvage and Anne Kay, who tell me they kept the membership records in a shorthand notebook! We need a bit more than that now, so they're managed on an Excel spreadsheet with a separate data base for the names and addresses which are submitted 5 times yearly to the distributors of the Third Age Matters magazine.

It's not an ideal system, but as yet we haven't found anything better. The national body has been exploring other options, but we feel that at this stage we'd like to wait until alternatives have been thoroughly trialled before we make any changes.

The same applies to methods of subscription payment. All systems bring some administrative complications and we'd want to be sure that any change to the present way of doing things would be for the better and not simply replace one lot of issues with another.

The job involves receiving forms and payments from new members throughout the year and dealing with membership renewals from January until April. New members find us in a variety of ways – through friends, prior knowledge of U3A's existence, local publicity like the recent shop window display and some have it suggested to them by organisations such as Age UK. Many people are certain that they want to join, and the first we hear of them is through the receipt of their form. Others make an initial phone call and can sound quite tentative. Sometimes seeking us out follows a difficult time in someone's life, and I like being able to offer reassurance that they'll be made welcome and can take their involvement gradually. They're informed that they can attend 2 activities as a visitor before becoming full members and I advise people to contact the group co-ordinator before attending an activity for the first time.

New members are required to complete a membership form and the initial fee for joining between January and August is £12. We now also offer a part year membership fee of £6 for those looking to join from September onwards. Last year we re-vamped the membership form, removing parts which no longer seemed relevant and including information about the nature of the organisation – in particular that we are an entirely voluntary, self help body which relies on its members to keep it running. We felt that as we grow, and now that some members come to us with very little background knowledge of the type of organisation we are, that it's important to emphasise that they're **members** not customers. They receive a Welcome card on which I write a welcome message, inform them of the existence of the

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website and the newsletters, and request that they get back in touch if they ever need any further information. We don't routinely send out printed information to new members as most now use the website, but there are still a number who are not computer users and I will send them information by post if requested.

The busiest time of year by far is of course the membership renewal period. As everyone here is aware, the final date for renewal is the last day in February. We do all we can to emphasise that point but there have always been a significant number who don't renew by then. (I'll go into figures later.) The majority of renewals are received by post, but a good number also pay in person at the meetings I attend. We request payment by cheque if possible as this gives a paper trail should I fail to record the payment when we're very busy, We do accept cash as well, but as my invaluable helper Lynne will tell you, I'm always obsessive about counting the cash and double checking that it tallies with the names recorded before the end of the meeting, as there's no way of tracking a cash payment if a discrepancy is discovered later. Between January and March, I'm a frequent visitor at the HSBC in Mold, usually paying in about £500 a time. During the course of a year, I bank well over £7000.

Following the end of February, the next step is to contact the group co-ordinators with the names of people who haven't renewed. They often have personal knowledge of some of the people and can let me know if there are circumstances which make it inappropriate to pursue them further at this time. Once we feel we have explored that route as much as possible, a letter is sent out requesting that they either renew or let us know they're not renewing by a certain date, (last year it was 22<sup>nd</sup> April) after which they should be aware that their membership has lapsed and they should not attend meetings or activities as they're not entitled or insured to do so. Last year 119 of these final reminder letters (covering 125 people) were sent out. The number of people who renewed following receipt of the letter was 58 so although it's quite costly and obviously time consuming, its costs are more than covered by the number of renewals it brings in. This year, the number of renewers to date is , considerably more than at the equivalent time last year, but still leaving to go.

I don't want to bombard you with figures, but here are a few which you may find interesting. Our total number of members on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2016 was 730, compared to 700 at the end of 2015 and 647 in 2014. The total number of non renewers in 2016 was 90, but the number of new members was 120 giving us the net increase in membership of 30, which I would have thought was a reasonable 'churn' for an organisation of this size.

I volunteered to do this job as, on the whole, I like it and feel it's good for me! I'm able to mostly do it at times that suit me, and it's a way I can help towards the running of an organisation which I get a lot from. I had to learn the new skill of managing a spreadsheet, - though my daughter who often sorts me out would probably take issue with the idea that I've fully mastered it. It's lovely meeting people and putting names to faces, and very

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satisfying when the amount of money registering on the spreadsheet tallies with the amounts of cash and cheques I've paid in. There have been a few scary moments when the spreadsheet appears to take on a life of its own but on the whole it works and I do appreciate the number of nice messages I get included with people's postal payments.

Thank s again to Lynne, and to you all for your support throughout the year.