Report of GL/RUGS meeting Friday 10 February 2017

Sally Baker welcomed 90 members to the Group Leaders and Really Useful Group's annual meeting on Friday 10 February at Reigate Manor Hotel. She and **Colin Mitchell** thanked them all for their vital contribution to the running of Reigate and Redhill U3A.

Jan Brown, the new Group Coordinator thanked Group Leaders for the support they have given her in taking over the role and stressed the importance of working collaboratively to ensure that members have accurate information to help them select groups to join. She presented some questions based on the current guidance for Group Leaders for comment and suggestions. Responses to these questions are summarised below.

Alex Hunter, the new Treasurer, outlined the financial model of U3A and the importance of having a clear picture of the number of members to enable sound financial planning. He asked Group Leaders to remind their members that their renewal subscription was due on 1 January. He also stated that he was compiling a list of U3A assets and requested that GL inform him of any equipment or other assets held by their groups.

John Hopkins, introduced the U3A Beacon membership management system that is now being used by the committee in coordinating membership, finance and groups. He asked for volunteers to form a pilot group of Group Leaders to explore how the system could be used to manage groups.

Pat Cockett, introduced the new website RRU3A.org.uk and thanked those who were involved – Shirley Harnett, Jan Brown and Valerie Osborne. She also thanked Valerie for her work over the last 12 years in designing and maintaining the old website. She thanked Tina Pankhurst for taking over the responsibility for printed publicity and asked for volunteers to join a rota for writing reports of events for the archives and the website. Members were requested to complete the recently published survey about communication.

David Freeman thanked all those who have delivered the Newsletters and magazines by hand and informed them that, in the future, the magazines will be posted out directly from the printer. He asked to be informed of any problems of safety on their delivery rounds so that adaptations can be made. He also asked for volunteers to deliver in the Horley Town area and welcomed offers of help in any area to cover holidays and illness of the current team.

Mike Cockett informed the meeting about the planned programme of evening events and asked for interest from individuals and groups for *Around the Maypole* – history, literature and traditions of love through the ages; *At the end of the Pier* - a look at the history and traditions of sea side holidays; and, *The 70s – do you remember them?* – songs, history and personal anecdotes of the 1970s.

David Fisher outlined a development in supporting members in their use of computing through help desks at the monthly coffee mornings at St Joseph's Church in Redhill. He asked for volunteers to form a rota throughout the year.

Summary of group responses to questions about the Draft Guidance Document for new Group Leaders

1) *Contributions*
   a) *What is your arrangement for reimbursing the host of a group? [The National Recommendation is 30p.*
The consensus was that 30p is still acceptable although it currently varies between 0p and 50p. Many groups who rotate the venue around the members do not pay. A few groups pay for 50p for coffee and photocopying. Two responses suggested 40p as the guidance but with explanation.

   b) *How and when do you let new members know what other costs or contributions will be expected? [these might include photocopying, premises, books etc]*

There was a variety of responses with some groups informing members as they join, others making decisions following discussion at the beginning of the year, and, some collecting money at the beginning of a meeting to ensure that the group is self-financing. One group asks for donation for cards and flowers if a member is ill or bereaved. Other groups charge separately for photo copying. There was a question about charging for postage for members not using email or asking for a stamped addressed envelope. There were no responses indicating that the written description of the course in the folders or on the website state that additional expenses are involved.

2) As many groups have waiting lists do you think it is fair to establish that if a member fails to attend a meeting three times without a valid reason that they should be classified as having left the group?

Many responses indicated that the GL should decide depending upon the circumstances and that members should always inform the GL and/or host if they will not be attending. Some queried why three absences had been chosen, that they would give more leeway or were not sure about this issue. Several responses assumed that the GL would follow up any unexpected absence. Another expressed the view that three 'no shows' is a valid reason to thinking they have left the group and that if they do not communicate, then it is up to leader to contact and persuade the member to give up their place and allow a new member onboard.

3) Occasionally we get requests for members and non-members to attend a group. How do you manage guests?

Some groups invite members not on waiting list to look see if they want to join and to assess if they are suitable. If they are suitable they are then referred to Jan for the waiting-list. Most groups welcome members to visit once or twice as a taster session, if there is room in the venue. Several responses stated that group members should be consulted before visitors are invited. One response indicated concern that a non-member would not be covered by insurance.

4) Are you agreeable to having your email address passed to members who request it?

All but 2 responses indicated that GL would be happy for their email address to be shared. One was only happy for their own group members to have the information and one said that GL should be able to opt out as they don't like their personal addresses known.

General issues raised by members.

- We prefer the term 'coordinator' to 'leader' as all should participate rather than be led. We like the phrase 'U3A is a co-operative and mutually supportive ….' We accept that in the case of a taught group e.g. languages, we need to have a 'teacher' who plans and monitors the sessions.

- **Use of email/internet**
  The new group management model depends on regular (daily?) use of email/Internet to keep in touch.
  2. A few U3A members either do not have email Internet (12%?), rather more have it (because their children have set it up) but do not use it regularly.
  3. Making contact and getting responses from the non-users is very hard and costly to leaders (we prefer coordinators!). It should be the responsibility of the non-users to propose an alternative means of keeping in touch. The leader should not have to keep on trying to make contact e.g. about meetings.

- Group leaders should not take on new members before checking with the group coordinator.

- Telephone call better than email for queries about the group (to the leader)

- I feel that full groups should accept new people, perhaps one or two at a time, teach them and set them up as a new group with others on the waiting list and not deny them totally.

- Is such a long prescriptive guidance document really necessary? If it was on one side of A4 it would be much more acceptable. But page 4 is very useful and on page 5 (Accident Form) it would be a good idea if it could state when it is to be completed as it is not realistic to expect it to be done at the scene especially if you are all over 80.

- Do new members get a welcome pack that tells them basic rules and regulations of groups etc?