

## **FOR INFORMATION**



### **INCOME GENERATION, COST CONTAINMENT, MEMBERSHIP RETENTION FOR SOCIETIES**

**FACT:** The average membership numbers of societies in the South West area has dropped by 15% over 15 years to 2017. A further 4.5% fall occurred in year 2017-2018. One of our societies has experienced a net loss of 40 members and there are now eleven out of twenty five societies with a membership of less than 150. This is not unique to our area. Societies with waiting lists are finding them shrinking. If you need to dig into your reserves, the warning bell is ringing loudly. What follows are a few suggestions to help your society to survive.

#### **INCOME GENERATION.**

**Consider your membership fee.** The average membership fee in the SW area in 2017 was £43 based on 2017 data from 21 societies. Perhaps you should compare the cost of a lecture with a theatre/cinema ticket or even a cup of coffee on the high street?

**Inflation.** Do you increase your fees annually in line with inflation? – Your costs will! Failing to raise your fees is income lost forever.

**Visitors.** How much do you charge your visitors for one lecture? If it is not an amount greater than the amount paid by subscribing members, what is the point of joining your society? The average lecture fee in the SW area in 2017 was £7.70.

**Sponsorship.** Not a dirty word and approved by the Arts Society. There can be a mutual benefit for local businesses such as lawyers, auctioneers, investment consultants, wine merchants and those whose typical clients are our members. *For instance – a business sponsors a lecture appropriate for that business (eg an IFA and a lecture on livery companies, coins etc.) They pay the lecturer's fees and are allocated a number of free tickets for their clients and advertising in your meet and greet area.* You might even pick up a few new members!

**Charity status.** Consider registering your society as a charity. One fifth of societies nationally and in our area are now charities. They receive back 25% of the membership subscription paid by tax-paying members. Higher rate taxpayers in addition receive 15 – 20% of the subscription back themselves. There are pros and cons but for some societies, they could not continue without this is a life line. Further details for our societies are available on the area website at [www.theartssocietysw.org.uk](http://www.theartssocietysw.org.uk) and further guidance can be obtained from HQ. Your treasurer really does not have to be an accountant!

**'Extra-mural' activities.** Consider the benefit of social gatherings in different venues with an informal (cheaper) talk from a local non-Arts Society speaker with food. Tea and cakes, light lunch. Hold an annual lunch. Suggest the members bring a friend. This is usually a valued social event and can raise your income and membership.

**Hold a raffle at each meeting.** Encourage the speaker to donate a copy of this latest book as the prize or ask a member to donate a bottle of bubbly.

Have a **second-hand book stall** at your lectures. Browsing at books provides another diversion whilst waiting for the lecture to start! Your area treasurer often buys a book one month and returns it the

following month to re-recycle! A member who does not like sitting on committees may be very happy running the book stall or the raffle year-in-year-out.

**Study visits, Tours and Cultural entertainments.** These provide a good means of generating surplus income. Your members will enjoy a group visit to somewhere such as a museum/NT property without the worry about transport and parking.

**Advertise for new members.** The best recruitment is by word of mouth. The new area leaflet may be used and there is space for a small sticker with your individual society contact details on the back. You are welcome to have a pack of these. Contact me at [yatesdavid135@gmail.com](mailto:yatesdavid135@gmail.com). Consider putting your programme in free arts local publications, parish magazines, flower shows etc. **Keep your website and social media up to date, diverse and interesting.**

**The committee.** Do you have a full committee and do you have volunteers at the lectures? Once members becomes more actively involved they suddenly want to boost your society, its activities, membership and reputation. A new committee member will bring a new circle of contacts. Volunteers will enhance your society in important roles – running the raffle, welcoming visitors, tea/coffee/wine rota and handing out and collecting members name badges.

COST CONTAINMENT.

**“Look after the pennies.....”** With a limited spectrum of expenses, there is not much scope to contain costs. But there is some.

**Negotiate hard with your lecturers.** If you share your concerns about membership numbers and financial state with the lecturer before booking, most will react sympathetically. They want to remain accredited lecturers. **Lecturers really are used to some societies haggling, so don't be coy about it!** There is a day course on negotiating skills available through the Arts Society for those involved in negotiating.

**Are you paying the right price** for your venue and are there hidden extras – e.g. paying for technical help or equipment hire? Is there someone in your society who has a lap-top and is prepared to lend it and work it. **Perhaps it is the person who runs your website? A grant** may be available from the SW Area to help with purchase of equipment. Details on the area website.

**Other fees.** Some societies pay for a professional audit of their accounts. This is absolutely not a requirement, even for societies which are charities. What is required is that your accounts are examined by a respected individual who does not need to be financially qualified. You may save a fee equivalent to several members!

Look critically at all your outgoings.

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION.

**Don't lose** a new member at the last hurdle! Do you have a friendly and inclusive society? Yes of course, we all do. But is this what a visitor, coming for the first time experiences? Consider the night of your lecture – your committee are busy with their tasks, the established members are chatting with their chums who they have not seen since the last lecture and the new visitor.....? Too often we hear *'I went to a meeting and no-one talked to me so I didn't go again'*.

**So** – Consider ways of introduction for a visitor. Give them an Arts Society sticky badge on check-in (free from HQ) to identify them and have a couple of volunteers as the welcome team. It is a bit of a fag, but

give out name badges to all your members and use a volunteer to put out/gather in the badges at the end of the meeting.

If a member decides to leave the society, please do your best to find out why. A leavers questionnaire is on the South West area website.

**Are you giving your members what they want?** You can find out by distributing randomly a small number of easy feedback forms at each lecture (examples in the documents section of the South West area web-site). Most people feel good if they think that their opinion is valued – even if they don't return the form.

**The programme secretary** has a very important responsibility in choosing the lecture programme. Make sure that this is shared and agreed with the committee before being confirmed. One badly balanced annual programme may lead to a large fall in membership next year.

**Communication.** Do you send a regular newsletter? The Area supports Mailchimp courses to make the task easy. **Share ideas** with other “competing” organisations such as U3A. We offer a different package and you may gain members through publicity.

**Piggy-back** arts festivals.

**Local School engagement** will help support your Young Arts group and may encourage parents to become members.

GOOD LUCK!

YOUR AREA TEAM IS HERE TO HELP YOU WITH ADVICE AND YOUR SOCIETY MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR AN AREA GRANT FOR RECRUITMENT MATERIAL, EQUIPMENT AND EVENTS. IF YOU HAVE GOOD IDEAS, PLEASE SHARE THEM WITH US ALL.

**David Yates, Chairman**  
**Jeremy Logie, Treasurer**

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