

Chair's Report

This report brings me to the end of my term of office as chair. It's been an interesting, challenging, and immensely enjoyable three years. It's certainly a relief not to have to make special arrangements for Covid any longer, with the efficient vaccination arrangements, build up of residual immunity, and better treatments for serious Covid-related illness all helping to minimise the problems that we have had in the recent past.

After a large drop in membership due to the impact of Covid, membership has been steadily increasing over the past two years. Having a fairly large membership allows us to run a very wide range of groups, which benefits all our members. Thanks are due to all the Group Leaders who keep their groups running, for without them we wouldn't have much of a u3a. We recognise the need to get more Group Leaders on board, reduce waiting lists for groups, and offer additional support to new Group Leaders. All of these will be priorities for our new chair.

Our finances are increasingly well-managed, and this puts us in a secure position for the future. As in previous years, a working group of six people (four Committee and two non-Committee members) reviewed our current arrangements and made recommendations to Trustees for September 2024. In recent years we have managed to introduce more consistent financial policies and reduce loss-making activities. We will continue to review financial policies and arrangements each year in order to ensure that members get maximum benefit for their contributions.

Keeping a tight grip on finances enables us to run a wide range of interest groups at a loss. This is rather unusual for u3as, the majority of which seem to require interest groups to be self-financing. However, our policy of not requiring groups to break even undoubtedly increases the range of groups we have on offer to members. It also enables us to provide additional resources to groups where necessary, such as the hearing assistance microphone/amplifier/speaker used in some groups to help members who are hard of hearing.

Managing finances well also allows us to offer a members' meeting each month at no charge to members. Although the majority of our members don't attend these, they are hugely appreciated by those who turn up. In the past there has been a summer break during June, July and August, but Trustees have now decided to continue the programme of meetings over the summer. We recognise that many groups take a break over the summer, so the opportunity for meeting u3a friends in interest groups falls dramatically over the summer for many of our members. Membership renewal days at the Masonic Hall last summer provided a welcome opportunity for coffee and a chat to friends, but they aren't really a proper substitute for the programme of members' meetings.

Plans are well under way for our 21st birthday celebration later this year. We are planning a two-day programme of exhibitions, workshops and performances that should be entertaining and stimulating for members. The main purpose is a celebration of what our u3a has achieved over the past 21 years, thanks to the hard work of all those who have been involved. Members of the public will also be able to attend most of the activities, so we expect to gain at least a few new members as a result of the celebration.

As I have mentioned before, we are fortunate to have a large group of volunteers who are committed to working in the best interests of members. These include the trustees, the group leaders, the 'meet and greet' team, the refreshment team, the library volunteers and lots of others who help with events when necessary. My thanks go to all of them on your behalf. And my best wishes go to Linda Bilsborrow, who will be taking over as chair for the next three years. I have every confidence in her when she takes on her new role.