

U3A – Chairman’s Annual Report

It was a great honour to be appointed your Chairman for 2017/2018.

It came at a time when our U3A was looking towards the 15th Anniversary of its formation and the 10th Anniversary of the Queens award.

It is an ideal opportunity, as we approach our AGM, to review the journey we have been on and to consider the exciting opportunities for the future. It has been said on many occasions that we are a voluntary organisation – indeed we are and as such we owe a debt of gratitude to all those members who have helped, from those early days and continue to help, to promote all the positives of the organisation and ensure that it is fit for purpose as we move forward.

Our U3A has changed over the years both in its size and the variety of activities available but the basic message remains as it provides, as we all grow older, a purpose and focus with like minded people to enjoy sharing life’s experiences from a wide background of careers and giving us all a chance to meet up with others and to enjoy activities which we may have been interested in but had never had the chance to enjoy.

A look at our excellent magazine easily sets out the wide range of activities available to members.

We are a registered charity and as will be seen at the AGM we are being asked by the Charity Commission to reaffirm our commitment to the charitable purpose of the U3A namely education. There has been shown over the years in the media that the concept of a Charity has been used and abused by many for personal gain rather than

focusing on the charity itself. The Third Age Trust on behalf of all the U3A's throughout the country has negotiated a form of wording that is acceptable to the Charity Commission which will then give blanket approval and which will maintain, without challenge, our charitable status. Your Trustees and the Management Committee have approved the change, subject to the matter being confirmed by the AGM.

We have adopted a different approach to the Third Age Trust in respect of paid tutors. They are of the view that tutors should come from within the membership. I respect that view but if members feel that paid tutors enhance the quality of the group/activity then that is a decision that we should maintain. It brings with it additional issues which have been considered at the Management Committee and endorsed by the Trustees.

We have during the year started to address issues of governance to make our U3A even better and fit for purpose as we move ahead. We have taken the view it is better to be ahead of the game rather than reactive. I have been grateful to those of our members who have put their names forward to assist. Our finance team has kept up their excellent work and is at Horizons every week to discuss financial matters and collect monies. The Management committee and Trustees unanimously support the consistent approach adopted by the Finance Committee. The TAT and the Charity Commission emphasise that monies collected are U3A monies and not monies of various groups.

We have established a Health and Safety group to address matters to better the protection of members. The new legislation on Data Protection cannot be ignored and a new committee has agreed to ensure there is compliance since a breach may lead to heavy fines. After

15 years the amount of paper and records that we have accumulated has grown to a size that no one person can keep them so an archiving committee is looking at electronic storage of the same. Our social committee has continued to work hard to provide quality events. On behalf of all our members I thank those who have taken on these tasks.

The membership decided to divide the management into a Trustee and Management role and this AGM sees three of our trustees standing down. They have done us proud over the last two years and have brought independent skills to the Trustee body and its meetings but also provided guidance and support to the Management Committee. I thank them on behalf of the Management Committee and the members. I know that Jeff Roberts, who is one that is retiring, will as Chairman of the Trustees thank his colleagues in his report. The retiring trustees, well before their appointment, had all given many years of service to U3A in a variety of roles and I really hope they will continue to remain not only as members but will continue to offer ideas, when appropriate, to the new Trustees to assist them in their task. They have laid a strong platform to move forward on.

I also see the retirement of a number of Management Committee members who have come to the end of their tenure of office under the constitution. They depart with the grateful thanks of all of us. I am sure the new members, when elected, will bring fresh ideas and approaches but the knowledge of those retiring has helped the Management Committee understand the historical background to various issues and thus enabled it to reach sometimes difficult decisions and their presence and commitment will be missed.

I am grateful to the Group Chairmen for all the work they put in with their groups.

You need only to see the list of speakers at our Speakers meetings to understand the quality and variety offered at our U3A

I appreciate that many members focus on the activity they are interested in - as it should be. The hard work of the committees in the background helps to protect members, provide financial and good banking practice, ensure insurance strength and understanding to minimise the risk to members and our U3A, along with compliance with charity law assisted with guidance from the Third Age Trust, These commitments are not choices – they are essential for good and proportionate governance. We must strive for an approach that is consistent and fair to all.

We have now been established for 15 years. It is good to look back as to what has been achieved but it is also important to look ahead in this changing world we live in. This organisation is not owned by the Trustees or the Management committee – it is owned by its members and I propose during the year to raise with members what they see is needed for the next 15 years and what change if any is needed – it may be that some aspirations cannot be achieved but the question needs to be asked.

I am personally grateful to our Secretary and my Vice Chairman for all their work and their calming influence when difficult issues have arisen

Ian Grant
Chairman

