

Chairman's Report to the AGM on 17 June 2021

When I volunteered for the role of Chairman, I had no idea that the pandemic was about to overtake us all and to make my first year as Chairman one unlike any other. We have all had to adjust to the various restrictions but, although outings and events have had to be cancelled and some groups were unable to continue, TWu3a has risen to the challenge.

My predecessor, Sue Brimlow, had, with impressive foresight for which we are immensely grateful, taken out a Zoom licence so we must have been one of the first u3as to have regular meetings on Zoom. We ran training sessions and now many members use Zoom regularly. We have had a very successful programme of two free talks each month, while Caroline Piper's tours, for which members pay a modest fee, have also been very popular. Many group meetings have also been held on Zoom, while other activities such as quizzes and even cookery lent themselves to the new technology.

Many new members have not yet received a proper introduction to u3a owing to the pandemic but in November we decided to hold a meeting for those who use Zoom. This highlighted a heartfelt need for social contact and we now hold twice monthly meetings for new members and have introduced Zoom coffee mornings. Of course, these are not accessible for those who do not have the internet or who prefer not to use Zoom, and we are very conscious of this. However, Zoom has genuine benefits for others and we intend to continue some virtual activities once we return to a more normal routine.

Providing activities and social contact for those not on Zoom has not been easy but many groups have been able to meet outside when weather permitted and many have kept in touch with their members by telephone or email. In addition, Bridget Sands, our Newsletter Editor, has made sure that the Newsletter contains things to do as well as to read and we are very grateful to Colin Brennan for keeping us on our mettle with his quizzes and to Eastbourne Meads u3a who kindly let us reprint their crossword each month. Those who receive the Newsletter by post, rather than by email, have also been receiving it in colour and with the bite-sized edition of the National Newsletter – those of us on the internet can see the full version at <https://www.u3a.org.uk/newsletter>.

Lockdown has encouraged co-operation and we are delighted this year to have been invited to lectures by The Friends of the Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery and to Paddock Wood u3a's study day on Climate Change, while members of other u3as in Kent have come to our Musical Evening with Holly Reynolds and our Hop-picking seminar.

u3a Office is worried about the general decline in membership of u3as nationally although this has not been a problem in Tunbridge Wells up to now. This year, however, our membership decreased more than usual as a result of the pandemic. Without a full programme to offer, membership applications have been slow but now that restrictions are being lifted they are beginning to increase. We have taken part in the national Pathfinder initiative on Retention and Recruitment and intend to take advantage of their findings. We are currently in the process of updating our website and have created a new outward looking Facebook page which we hope will encourage new members. We are looking for members with IT experience to help carry these projects forward. The new Publicity Team has also produced leaflets and posters for distribution.

This brings me to our volunteers, without whom the u3a would not be able to function. I am very grateful indeed for all the help and support which I have received during this difficult year from the Committee and from the many volunteer teams, our unsung heroes. I should also like to thank Jean Brushfield who, after a year as a co-opted member of the committee, is leaving Tunbridge Wells and Ruth Johnson, our Membership Secretary whose six year term on the committee is coming to an end. Ruth has looked after members new and old with warmth and efficiency and we shall miss her. Her replacement will be elected at the AGM and our thanks go to her for volunteering.

We do not know exactly what restrictions, if any, will remain. As I write, however, the future looks promising and I know that, with your help, TWu3a will grow from strength to strength.

Eryll Fabian