

## **Chairman's Report to the AGM on 15 June 2023**

The last year has been a period of both consolidation and growth as we threw off the restraints of the pandemic. After a considerable drop in membership during lockdown, our numbers are continuing to grow steadily and in early April (just out of this reporting period) we shall top the 1000 mark once more. We have held two lively New Members' Meetings during the year in which new members learnt about the history and ethos of u3a and were able to chat to group contacts and committee members in an informal manner.

Our groups continue to be the core of our activity, and many have been created during the year, though some fail to get off the ground because of the reluctance of members to act as group contacts. Groups come in all forms and sizes and have different aims. Our Quiz Group collects their prize money and, this year, celebrated having donated £5000 to charity! As a new departure, our Groups Coordinator arranged two working breakfasts for group contacts where common problems and possible solutions could be discussed.

Our Outings Team arranged a varied and very popular programme of outings during the year as did the Events Team. The Barn Dance, for example, which had had to be postponed for 2 years because of Covid, finally took place in October.

Sandra McDonald, our Vice Chair and Short Breaks and Holidays organiser, arranged two short breaks, one to Devon and one to the Midlands, which were, as always, very popular. She is stepping down this year after six years in which she has been a tireless and forceful member of the committee. Thanks are due to her from us all but I would like to add my personal thanks especially for her help and support during the last year when she has been our Vice Chair. Members will be delighted to hear that she has kindly agreed to continue to organise short breaks, trips to South Wales and Luxembourg in 23/4 already being fully booked and plans afoot for 24/5.

Bob Slater, our Talks Organiser, will also be handing over at the end of 2023 after six years in the role. He has continued to provide us with a varied and interesting programme of talks at monthly meetings which have been very much appreciated. Christiane Higgins has volunteered to take over the role. We wish her well and hope that she will have a less stressful time than Bob who not only had to produce two speakers each month while we held the meetings on Zoom during the pandemic, but also to contend with all the problems associated with the uncertainty of the Camden Centre roof once we returned to meeting face-to-face.

We had hoped to return permanently to the Camden Centre for our monthly meetings in January. Storage space is available there which makes setting up the meetings, which continue as hybrid meetings with some members joining in on Zoom, much easier for our AV team, and also allows us to have a book and jigsaw exchange as well as to display group and other information. Unfortunately, after only two months, the ongoing repairs made it impossible for the Camden Centre to house us and we returned to the Tunbridge Wells Christian Fellowship in March. We are most grateful to the latter who allow us to use their Hall at short notice. Special thanks are also due to the AV Team, the T Team (as the tea team is now known), and the Jigsaw and Book Exchange organisers who cheerfully and without fuss adjust their arrangements for whichever venue we are at.

As well as the programme of monthly talks, we have hosted two exceptional talks this year. The first, "Over Berlin at Night in a Mosquito Bomber" was given by Colin Bell then aged 102, though no one would have guessed it. The second was the idea of Sandra Blacker, the Science and Technology group contact who invited Greg Clark, our MP who is chair of the

Parliamentary Committee on Science And Technology, to speak to us. Both talks were fascinating. Both were reported in the local press.

The success of our display at the Queen's Jubilee, encouraged us to buy a gazebo which we have taken to local fetes and erected under the Millenium Clock on u3a Day to help raise the profile of u3a. It was hard work but the Gazebo Volunteers thoroughly enjoyed meeting the public and are looking forward to being out with the gazebo again this summer. The display undoubtedly helped our recruitment drive, as did the help of two local journalists who have been actively supporting TWu3a in the press. We need to extend our publicity and this I am hoping to undertake with the support of the committee when I stand down.

Behind the scenes, the committee has been active and this year we adopted an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy which can be found on the Small Print section of our website together with our Constitution and other policies. We are indebted to Sandra MacDonald and Anne Goldstein for all the hard work which they put into compiling the policy and who will be continuing to monitor its implementation.

TWu3a is an active member of the u3a Kent Network which enables u3as throughout Kent to discuss common problems and concerns and to share information such as details of the SE Forum Summer School, which several of our members attended last summer. This year several of our committee members have also taken advantage of the new peer-to-peer groups between committee members in different u3as which the Network has set up.

This will be my last report to the AGM as I, too, am stepping down after six years on the committee. I took over as Chairman three years ago just as the pandemic had started which certainly provided a lot of challenges. I think I shall be remembered as the Chairman who was forever asking for volunteers. We always need more, but it is with the help of those of you who volunteer that we have come through Covid and settled once more into a normal rhythm and I cannot thank you all enough for your help and support. I have mentioned a few by name above but there are so many – members of the Committee itself, the Group Contacts, Talks Organiser, AV Team, T-Team, Events Team, Group Organisers, Gazebo Volunteers, Jigsaw and Book Exchange organisers, the EDI specialits, Beacon Administrators, the Webmaster and her helper. If I have omitted anyone, it is not intentional but merely that there are so many people who, quietly and unobtrusively, make things in TWu3a work ... a true example of our motto: *by the members, for the members*.

I have enjoyed my time as Chairman very much, with all its ups and downs, but now is time to hand over. I wish the new team every success and look forward to seeing TWu3a grow in new and exciting directions.

Eryll Fabian  
May 2023