



## Chair Report 2019-20

What a year! One which will never be forgotten, and that we will wish had never happened. I must first thank you, the members and the committee who have done so much to keep Chester U3A open, vibrant, and available to all. It has not been easy for any of us, learning to work in different ways, learning all those new IT skills. Zoom has now become common usage; we appreciate your support, perseverance and dedication. The adaptation to the covid-19 restrictions has taught us that we enjoy learning and socialising and we enjoy U3A activities, even if it means socialising through a screen. The committee have worked really hard getting together the zoom meetings, online talks, and events. I cannot thank them enough.

### Committee Changes

Sadly, Kay Lunt stepped down in July as Group Liaison Officer. Kay, a long standing and popular member of the committee has looked after the groups for many years, she joined the committee in March 2011, elected as Group Liaison in 2012, when we had 843 members and 70 interest groups. Currently we expect to have about 800 members and 88 interest groups. (actual numbers will be announced at the AGM) and we have still managed to attract new members this year. Thank you for your many years of support.

Due to the postponement of the U3A day and personal circumstances, Gordon Bowyer also stepped down. Gordon has been an active member of Chester U3A for as long as I can remember, always ready to help. He has been Chair, Group Liaison, Treasurer, and Vice Chair twice over the last nine years. Thank you

Bob Davies will also be leaving the committee. Bob my predecessor as Chair has been our link to the Trust as Business Secretary bringing his experience of Chair into committee discussions.

Graham Proctor, a valuable committee member has also stepped down. His experience on committee proceedings was always useful. Thank you.

At the last AGM we were in a different place. Chester had 1058 members. Gary was busy working with a team upgrading the Beacon management system. Joint membership for members was introduced. The new Chester U3A constitution was finally given approval by the Charity Commission. The Deeside and Wirral network was officially affiliated to the Trust and the U3A Day planned for June was progressing well under the watchful eye of Gordon. Social events were cancelled or postponed with more in the planning stage. We did manage to hold Popular Science successfully in February with the new organisers, Helen Pulford and Mal Waite. Our thanks go to Janet Money who organised Popular Science for many years before passing the baton onto Helen and Mal.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March lockdown in UK was declared, we could no longer print our News Sheet, so in April there was an online replacement. The U3A day was postponed, much to the disappointment of Storyhouse and those of us involved. This was going to be such a big event!

The committee were determined that Chester U3A activities should continue for our members, many of whom would be alone at this time. Communication was the key. A survey showed that only 108 members had not registered an email address. All were contacted, some actually had an email address, those that did not assured us that they would be kept in touch by either a coordinator or a U3A friend.

St Columba's hall was closed so monthly meetings moved online. This task was led by Sue Foy who had to source new speakers, set up recordings and reschedule just about everything. The online talks have been received so well that some lecturers have now approached us. There have been additional benefits, the online talks can be viewed over a month, those with difficulties in attending meetings or hearing impairment are more easily able to access the talks. This has led to an increase in engagement. At St Columba's about 180 members attended, now viewing is often up to 500 – 600 members and is available to all. Online talks are now being requested by other U3As. Thank you Sue and those that helped you, for the time and effort that made this so successful. Chester U3A now has its own YouTube Brand channel, which will connect the science and group videos already recorded.

A new development team has been formed by Stuart Murray and Mal Waite to take forward technology within the interest groups. Stuart and Mal will take on the role of Groups Coordinators. The name of the member who organises the group will be known as Coordinator. This year for the first time there will be a group report

As lockdown continued, social events needed to be cancelled, members missed the face to face contact, so we held a series of coffee mornings to 'Keep in touch' a new experience for many using Zoom. Those who attended, appreciated the effort. Gary was always on hand as National Zoom trainer for our members. Information was and still is changing. In May lockdown was easing, so we held a coordinators meeting to discuss the latest advice, 'holding outdoor activities' which had been received from the Trust. Over 40 coordinators attended after which some outdoor groups started to plan their activities. Further advice has now been received on starting groups during covid restrictions, published on the website.

I am sad to leave Chester U3A committee, but the time is right. I started as membership secretary in 2005, moved through the roles of Chair of Chester, twice, Chair of Network, Regional committee member and Trust Board member representing the North West Region – It was a route I did not anticipate when I retired. It has been rewarding and challenging. I am proud to be a member of Chester U3A. My advice to any member out there is 'VOLUNTEER', take one step at a time and see where it leads.

The future of Chester U3A is yours. I am handing over to Ben John with a full committee who have lots of ideas. I have every confidence that he will lead Chester U3A successfully even with Covid-19 in the way.