



Chair's Report by Liz Day 2019-20

It has been a privilege to have been Chair of D&D U3A for the last six years, but it is now time to step down and let a new member take up the challenge. Roman Bednarz is also stepping down as Secretary. As two of the original officers, founding this U3A, we set up the Executive Committee, established its remit, organised the annual calendar of events and encouraged the first Interest groups to develop – thus establishing the U3A that runs so successfully today. We hope to continue to be involved not only locally, but with the London Region of U3A and Nationally in the U3A movement, where we have both taken active roles and got to know key officers and staff.

It has been exciting to be part of the founding of a local organisation that so reflects my passions of purposeful and enjoyable learning, and meeting like minded people through shared activities. As D&D U3A has developed over the last six years, I am very grateful to the enthusiastic volunteers on the Executive Committee, who have taken on considerable responsibilities of being a Trustee and growing the organisation for the benefit of our members, contributing a range of professional skills, their local knowledge and networks, together with hours of their time. The committee have been a great support to me as the Chair. We are very lucky in Dulwich to have members willing to give their time and to find such a wealth of talent and expertise.

Our Interest groups continue to grow steadily, as our membership grows. Before lockdown we had almost 700 members and nearly 100 active interest groups, some meeting monthly, some fortnightly and a few weekly. As you see from the Interest group reports they offer a large range of artistic, practical, sport and intellectual activities. We need to say a huge thank you every year, and many times a year, to our Convenors who organise our groups so tirelessly and encourage their members to take an active part in their learning.

We have also developed an interesting programme of Monthly talks with speakers that, in the main, are known to us or members have heard speak elsewhere. These monthly meetings have given us a chance to share programme notices, socialise over tea, discuss the speaker's talk further, compare our U3A experiences, and feel we are part of a social, learning community. We have also continued to enjoy our social events such as the Quiz and Golf Club lunch last Christmas and last Garden Party at Bell House last summer, even though it poured with rain.

Then came the lockdown in March and our lives changed, as did our U3A activities. Our immediate concern was to support our members, which we did by communicating frequently with them by Newsletter, email, phone and social media with contact lists of local support and online learning opportunities. We then encouraged our Convenors to support their groups, through virtual learning if at all possible. For our age group, who have been perceived as being reluctant to engage in virtual learning, we have done so well. Zoom came to our rescue. Our most technically competent colleagues helped us all out, showing us how to host and participate in zoom meetings through various practice sessions and

many of our Interest groups ploughed ahead. Infact some Interest groups now meet more often because they have had more time at home, and more time alone, and appreciated the extra social contact. Members can also join meetings from a distance and don't have to worry about travelling. For some groups, with presentations or pictures and film clips to share the 'share screen' option in zoom enhanced their learning experience. Small group discussions, quizzes, language groups have also worked well with groups working out how to take turns in discussion, encouraging their members participation. But for some groups virtual learning has not worked, either because the activity precluded remote learning like sports or visiting places of interest, or because members did not have the equipment or the inclination to learn remotely. Some of these, who can meet outside, are beginning to re-group as the lockdown eases over the summer.

Our monthly talks have also gone virtual, with speakers prepared to give presentations on zoom, our AGM organised virtually, and two inspiring Showcase Events that celebrated the diverse talents of our members in May and June. These presentations have taken a lot of rehearsing and organising as we have overcome virtual learning challenges. We are very grateful to committee members and performers involved.

And as we come out of lockdown, what next?

It is difficult to envisage when and how our age group is going to feel comfortable to meet again in any numbers face to face, particularly indoors. So we envisage the current virtual learning experiences continuing into the autumn. Maybe in the future we attempt hybrid meetings, with some members socially distanced and other joining a meeting remotely. As you see from the Treasurer's report we have suspended membership fees until further notice, recognising the limits of our current offer overall.

We are being supported with advice from the Third Age Trust through their national website and the London Region of U3As where 44 London U3As share their good practice and their challenges. But ultimately, as an independent U3A it is up to us to meet when and how we choose, with our health and safety paramount.

Good luck with future D&D U3A ventures, where we look forward to more experiences when we Live, Learn and Laugh together.