

Ealing U3A Annual Report 2020-21 by Derek Atkinson, Chairman

The Chairman reminded the meeting that we had started the year in lockdown and his report covered the period from the date of last AGM on 19 March to 25 March 2021. The previous AGM had been cancelled because a number of members had received text messages from the NHS telling them to stay at home to shelter for three months.

Lockdown seemed very strange at first, and he said we all felt as if we were in a sci-fi movie and that we would wake up one day and find we were back to normal. However, as the months went on, it ceased to be strange and became a way of life. We had adapted, and adapted also to the idea that the only way that life will ever return to normal for us was if there was a vaccine we could trust.

At the beginning he had felt that this was a temporary situation and that by the Autumn things would be back to normal. However, during August it became clear that things would be very far from normal for the Autumn and when the Prime Minister spoke of being semi-locked down for another six months, there was quite a palpable feeling of depression. He knew how hard it was for our members not to see their children and be separated from grandchildren.

The Committee took the decision that we must keep in touch with all of our members by whatever means possible for them, and that our U3A must go on functioning as fully as possible.

Ealing U3A Executive Committee

By 19 March 2020, there were no new nominations for election to the committee, so the committee from March 2019 remained in place for 2020, except that Margaret Proctor had retired from it, having served three years. He was very grateful to her for all her work for Ealing U3A, and especially for the lovely way she has welcomed new members and told them about what we do.

The Committee had met each month from March to December 2020. It normally met every other month, but it was felt important to keep reviewing our situation and what Ealing U3A could offer to its members during the lockdown period.

Ealing U3A News

The Committee had decided to put out a regular news sheet, emailed to all members who had email, and posted to those who did not. Ealing U3A News does contain a number of internet links, which we were aware were not much use for people without email, of whom there are about 45. It had begun as a news sheet sent from the Committee, but as time had gone on, other members had taken part and co-edited editions.

Zoom Lectures

We started to meet by Zoom, and had a steep learning curve at first. We held our first Zoom Thursday morning talk on 7 May, given by Colin Lomas on the "Glasgow Boys," the painters in Glasgow between 1818 and 1890s. We were delighted that 89 people joined us by Zoom. Given that the talk was illustrated with paintings, Zoom was an extraordinarily good medium and a lot of us had a better view of the paintings than we would have had in Ealing Green Church. Subsequently we had talks by Zoom every other week.

The talks proved so popular that we decided to purchase a Zoom licence which allowed us to have up to 500 people attending. So we started our Autumn Term talks with the capacity for 500 people to join us on a Thursday morning. We offered our lectures to the London Region, which again was very successful, and we had over 200 people joining us.

The Summer Programme of three talks took place at the end of July and during August, and again we had good audiences by Zoom. Glynis Meredith-Windle spoke on Florence Nightingale, on the 200th anniversary of her birth, and on that occasion we had some 260 Ealing and London Region U3A members joining in. We completed the summer programme with talks by Camilla Nichol on the Antarctic Heritage Trust, and by Nicholas Henderson on, "This England - where did it come from."

In the autumn term we were delighted to have a guest lecture by Professor Philippe van Parijs, addressing us from the University of Louvain in Belgium, on the concept of a universal basic income. This was the second lecture open to London Region U3A members to attend. We were able to extend further talks to our London colleagues in October and November. The speakers were Professor Emma Smith from Hertford College, Oxford speaking about "Shakespeare on Stage and Page" and a wonderful, moving, presentation given by Olivia Marks-Woldman OBE who is the CEO of The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. The talks each attracted an attendance of 300+.

We were delighted that we were able to offer a total of four diverse and interesting talks to our London colleagues as many of them were not receiving any talks via their local U3A. Since then we have had our own talks on a Thursday morning every other week, and have filled in the intervening weeks with virtual coffee mornings. We had a drop-in mince pie and drink Zoom meeting on Christmas Day as well.

Group Meetings by zoom

Meanwhile, a number of our groups started meeting by Zoom too, and the Committee decided to take out an additional Zoom licence to allow groups to meet for a longer period than 40 minutes - which is the

meeting cap in place for the free use of Zoom and more than two people. This has been very successful, as about half our groups have been meeting regularly by Zoom, using our two Zoom licences. Other groups have met using personal licences, or during the pleasant summer and autumn weather, they have met in a garden or park. We have been careful always to observe the social distancing guidelines, and the government's rules as they were at the time.

Photographic Competition - October 2020

The Photographic Competition which was judged by Michael Lurie in October was hugely successful, and we were delighted with the number of entries. With the photographs backlit and shown on our screens, they looked absolutely terrific. My thanks go particularly to Sue Peach and Phil Broomsgrove, who organised the viewing session. and of course, to Michael Lurie for judging and for his interesting talk on photography.

U3A Members during 2020

We started taking membership renewals in 2019, using online banking, as well as renewals in the Church. At that time there was no concern about the Covid virus, so our numbers of renewals were 458 as at March 2020. So far in March 2021 our membership renewals are 375. Sadly, seven members have passed away. Our Treasurer will talk about the consequences of this reduction in membership renewals in her financial statement.

U3A Terms and the Committee

So the Spring Term, the Summer Programme, the Autumn Term, and the Winter Term passed and we have settled into having Zoom talks, and Virtual Coffee Mornings. I want to thank Rosemary Richardson for her tremendous work on getting speakers for us. We have had some really excellent talks by Zoom, and are now getting a regular 120 Ealing U3A members attending. Rosemary will continue with organising speakers until the end of 2021, when we hope we will have found someone to take over from her.

Mike Stott has been the deputy chairman, and Derek thanked him for his support in any number of areas; Jill Winter has been outstanding as Membership Secretary, and during her term of office had seen us transfer our membership records to the Beacon database, which was licensed from the National u3a; Sue Peach has kept meticulous records of our finances, and ensured that we start our next financial year in a good situation despite everything; Phil Broomsgrove. and Jurek Narozanski, who was co-opted to the committee in the Autumn term, have kept our website and communications systems up to date, including putting up links to Youtube recordings of our talks for members who missed them.

Tim Carter, as Groups Co-ordinator, has kept in touch with Conveners, and advised and encouraged groups to meet one way or another at the

various different types of lockdown; Ed Baker has devised a public relations strategy for us, which we shall be taking forward when things permit, and Sylvia Stirling has been our Secretary and has continued to be our guiding influence keeping impeccable committee and communication records not only within Ealing but also with London Region and National Offices. Both she and Sue Peach have, over the last few months, alternated the editorship of the successful periodic news sheet.

The Coming Year

Our IT team are looking at ways to live stream our future Thursday morning talks once we can return to normal to enable those of our less mobile or distant members, who are now enjoying the fortnightly Zoom talks, to continue to view and take part in such events. It is, unfortunately, unlikely that we can fully return to Ealing Green Church till after the Summer and the committee are planning accordingly.

It is also intended to arrange New Members Coffee Mornings as soon as practicable, as he said he was very much aware that it had been some 18 months or so since new members had the opportunity to meet with the various Interest Group Conveners. It would be a wonderful day when we could all meet again "live" though he was aware that the use of Zoom would and must continue in certain circumstances and we would renew the licences in due course.

In concluding he said that he wished to thank all the members who had stayed with us during these strange circumstances, had undertaken the technology learning curve with us and had been able to participate in our interest groups and enjoy the Thursday morning talks and virtual coffee mornings. His especial thanks went to the Interest Group Conveners and members who had managed to keep so many groups active and, indeed, been able to accommodate new members as well as create a couple of brand new groups.

Finally, he said he looked forward to the future when he trusted that the second part of 2021 would allow ALL of us to venture outside and enjoy our lives again.
