

East of England Notes June 2020

When this year started I had grand plans for the various activities I was hoping to do in the region and by now I would have seen many of you at the various network meetings that were already in my diary. All of this now seems to belong to a parallel universe to the one we are currently living in. Like everyone when the lock down was announced my diary was suddenly empty until all the Board and committee meetings were rearranged on-line. Far from having extra time to catch up with all those non U3A activities we have all been busier than ever especially the staff in the national office. Despite all of them having to work from home they have coped with a significant increase in requests for help and advice at the same time as having to cancel or re-arrange all the activities that had been planned for U3A members.

The amount of U3A activities that have adapted to using technology is truly inspiring and many of these have initiated by individual study group members. Some networks have also been proactive in collating and sharing ideas which has reinforced the value that comes from belonging to networks and working collaboratively. We need to build on these initiatives as the U3A movement adjusts to life beyond Coronavirus.

One of the key jobs that I do as a regional trustee together with the staff in the national office is to share ideas. In the short run we can best do this by encouraging all U3A members to sign up to receive the newsletter sent out by the office so please encourage your members to do this. It is free!

One of the jobs that has consumed some of my time in the past few weeks has been helping to plan the AGM for the Trust, which should have been at the end of August. One of our concerns was that even if the lock-down was completely lifted by then we felt that many U3A members would be reluctant to travel and attend a large indoor meeting. We therefore decided that it would be sensible to hold a virtual AGM which gave every U3A an opportunity of participating. However, we have had to wait until emergency legislation has gone through Parliament to allow companies to hold virtual AGMs where their governing documents don't normally allow it. Unlike U3As the Trust is both a charity and a company hence slightly different rules apply.

We will be using a specialist company to provide the technology which enables individuals to hear the presentation, see any slides and ask question via an email system and vote securely on-line. The normal proxy voting arrangement will also be available should U3As prefer to vote in this way. Full details of the process will be circulated nearer the time. If this proves to be a popular and successful way of holding the AGM, then we can consider changing our Articles of Association to allow a hybrid event in future where attendance could be in person or on-line.

By now you should have received the notifications for the AGM including the nomination forms for the regional trustee. The rules now allow a regional trustee to stand for re-election for a further two years after their initial three-year term of office. This is now my fourth year and although I could stand for a final fifth year I have decided not to. There are two main reasons for my decision the main one being a desire to reduce the time I spend on Trust activities. Apart from providing advice and support to the 141 U3As in the region over the past year I have got heavily involved in several of the Trusts committees. Apart from attending the main Board meetings I am the chairman of the governance committee, and as such a member of the finance committee, a director of the trading company and have to attend some other groups when there are governance issues to be considered. As a result, I am very aware that I have not been as proactive in the region as I could have.

I can remain on some of the committees without being a trustee, assuming the chairman wants me to, so I have decided to focus my time supporting the Trust in this way and make way for someone else to take over as regional trustee. In addition, now seems good time for someone with fresh ideas to work with U3As in the region to help where needed as we all probably have to adjust to different challenges and ways of working post lock-down.

It's not been an easy decision to make as I have enjoyed meeting you and visiting new parts of the region and assisting where I can with advice and support. However, all good things have to end, and I would have to stand down in a years' time. My decision has been made easier knowing that there is someone who is prepared to stand for election as your regional trustee. The code of conduct for trustees prevents me from canvassing on behalf of candidates but this person has deputised for me on a few occasions so I have every confidence in their abilities should they be elected.

However I am still your trustee until the AGM on September 29th so let me know if you need any advice or assistance. This now includes the ability to participate in meetings using Zoom.

Jeff Carter

Trustee, East of England

Phone 01923 770188, mobile 07749 080982