

JULY 2022

At the beginning of July 2021, the government lifted the remaining restrictions that had been applied during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. Finally, we were able to start real activities, meeting face to face in the venues that we had been using. At least that was the theory. The reality was rather different.

All our meetings are held in local public facilities and the first task was to get in touch with each one and discover their plans for reopening. Some had plans, some did not: some moved quickly, others more slowly. Moreover, the changes of venue which had occurred at various stages of the lockdown meant that while some groups had to be relocated, others took the opportunity to ask for a change. Life was rather complicated! However, thanks to the efforts of group leaders and particularly, of our volunteer Venue Co-ordinator, Kath Gifkins, things seemed to run pretty smoothly and groups were beginning to meet again. Those with the most 'Covid friendly' circumstances started first: Walking being outdoors and easy to employ the required separation between members was the first.

We decided to start the new season and the freedom to mix in September with a barbeque, held at the Five Bells in Burwell. The sun shone and some 50 members enjoyed an afternoon together for the first time in ages. *The committee has decided to repeat the idea of a summer function as well as the Winter Lunch and next year we shall be holding a buffet lunch at the Ellesmere Centre in Stetchworth.*

The second event, planned and booked for winter 2020, was a trip to Thursford to see their Christmas Extravaganza, the biggest Christmas show in Europe – they say! After some interesting moments, regarding cancellations and postponements, all went well, our members all enjoyed the very seasonal event and have asked for another visit soon. *(We would have to book in January 2023 for a visit in December 2023!)* And thirdly, of course, we have just had the very successful Summer Outing to Norfolk, organised again by Niddy who ensured the arrangements were faultless and the sun shone.

The official guidance last autumn was not very clear and individuals really had to make their own minds up as to how they would proceed. Some members re-joined their groups immediately, others were more hesitant and waited to see how things would proceed, so meetings grew in size throughout the winter and into spring 2022. As we looked at membership numbers during 2021, we

had clearly lost some 20% of our membership. Some decided not to risk meetings yet, while for others, alternative activities had superseded those of Newmarket U3A. Now, in June 2022, the membership is beginning to grow very pleasingly.

The lockdown had many ramifications, including the financial. When all groups were suspended, in March 2020, the committee decided to waive the membership fee for that year since there would be no meetings or other events to attend. The Resources Sub committee continued to keep a sharp eye on finances and it seemed clear that it was time to raise the annual fee from £10, where it had been for years, to £12.50. A Special General Meeting was held and the motion to increase the fee was passed – so from 1 August this year the new fee comes into effect.

At the heart of every U3A are the Interest Groups. We have recently had some twenty groups but these do vary, coming and going for various reasons. At present Drama is 'resting', Mah-Jong has stopped for the time being, while MOTO, Members on their Own, and Lunch group go from strength to strength. Following a recent request, we are investigating the possibilities of running a Rubber Bridge Group. (*This varies slightly from the game of Contract Bridge.*) All the up-to-the-minute details on each group are on our website. If you would be interested in joining, or particularly, leading a new group do get in touch with the Groups Co-ordinator.

Finally, I am sure you are aware that our group exists and thrives because of the members prepared to take on responsibilities. At this AGM four members of our committee are standing down. They are, Niddy Walpole, Vice Chair; Joanne Garner, Secretary; Cheryl Bampton, Membership Secretary – and me! My sincere thanks to them and to all the members of the committee for the past year. I would also like to thank, Kath Gifkins, Chris Timmins and Rosemary Foreman who continued to help organise things even though no longer serving on the committee.

I offer my very best wishes to those who take the reins next, I am sure Newmarket U3A will continue to thrive and to occupy a central role in this community.

Tim Young