



**A.G.M. 2021**

## **Chairman's Report for the Year 2020-2021**

### **Introduction**

2020 was a complex and exceedingly difficult year for everyone! Newmarket U3A was no different. During the summer, the Executive Committee decided, in the light of national and international events, to postpone the Annual General Meeting in the hope that things might improve. Eventually, in August we decided that this was unlikely and we would hold our AGM online, using the Zoom facility, ensuring that all members received all the necessary documentation either by email or as hard copies. A small Working Group was set up and very efficiently produced all the forms required to allow all members to participate properly in the process. The AGM itself was very successful and extremely well attended. That working group has swung into action again to carry out the necessary tasks for the 2021 AGM to be held on the traditional last Monday of July, the 26<sup>th</sup>. The Third Age Trust and the Charity Commission have again made exceptions to U3A constitutions to allow us to hold digital meetings. During the next year it will be necessary for us to hold a Special General Meeting to alter the constitution to allow these online, or hybrid, meetings in future.

The Executive Committee decided in March 2020 to give members a free membership year as most regular activities would not be happening. At the same time, the Committee gave new members a 50% discount. However, we still had a number of expenses of which the greatest was the annual capitation fee paid to the Third Age Trust. This was £3.10 per member. In addition, there were expenses for printing and speakers and minor running expenses. As a result, our funds are relatively low, as you will see from the balance sheet provided. However, the committee felt that this was an appropriate course of action. Despite all of the above, the committee determined to retain the membership fee at £10 for the 2021/22 year but is looking to raise this from the AGM in 2022.

We continued to make efforts to retain our membership and to encourage new members to join. At the peak of the pandemic, we appeared to have lost about 10% of the membership – a very healthy figure when compared with many U3As – and the membership is now slowly increasing.

### **Activities**

During the Autumn we were hoping that the restrictions would be relaxed but this was not to be, and indeed, things got worse: there was absolutely no chance that groups would meet face-to-face for the foreseeable future. This meant that some Interest Groups, for example Walking and Lunch were simply unable to meet. Co-ordinators did their best to stay in touch and to offer suggestions as to what individuals might be able to do. Other groups went over to holding meetings on Zoom and have continued to do this throughout the winter and so far, in 2021. The individual groups' co-ordinators have written a short report and you will find all these collected together, in the AGM pack. I and the Executive Committee are extremely grateful for the hard work, and inventive and imaginative activities that have been carried out over the last nine months. I should point out that, while **we** have continued a programme for members, many U3A groups have simply shut down completely!

In November and December our members usually volunteer in the Charity Christmas Card shop in Newmarket High Street but, as this could not function during lockdown, we turned our attention to the Charity Shoebox Appeal organised through St Mary's Church, Ashley. In a short time,

members filled 23 shoeboxes with gifts for children. At the same time, we participated in two Christmas tree festivals, creating 'U3A Trees' in, predominantly blue and yellow.

Usually, the U3A Drama group has performed a Christmas show in various local venues. Unable to do that, we moved online, the eight performers bringing a variety of Christmas items to an enthusiastic, digital audience. In the interval the new Cook Off Friday group tasted and tested their seasonal products.

## **Media**

With the onset of the Lockdown, we moved to a monthly 'E-News', produced digitally and emailed to members but also printed as hard copy and delivered to members not on the Internet. At the same time, many of the co-ordinators began to make more use of the Newmarket U3A website, providing a variety of activities for members to try. In this they were supported by our Website Editor who devised various techniques to allow online quizzes, articles, play readings, book reviews, music performances and even jigsaw puzzles. The website has grown into a fascinating collection of information and activity.

While this was very pleasing and provided much for our members during lockdown, we were mindful that those members not on the Internet were deprived of this support. So, we devised an 'Offline Pack' which was distributed to 30+ members. It consisted of a range of articles, poems from our members, and items that had appeared on the website. To this we added books and magazines to create an interesting and informative pack.

The Publicity Sub-committee is in the process of producing a magazine called 'MOVING FORWARD' which charts our activity during the pandemic through the eyes of committee members, Interest Group Leaders and members. This is to be printed and distributed to all members. This is yet another original and supportive idea from our committee members.

## **Speaker Meetings**

The fundamental get-together of most U3As, and ours is no exception, is the monthly speaker meeting - called that because it always features a guest speaker. These moved online and our new Speaker Secretary rounded up a series of fascinating speakers on a wide range of topics. There are certain advantages to holding meetings on Zoom, one of which is that the speaker can live anywhere in the world and still join you with their specialist knowledge. (Incidentally, on the other side of this matter, I have used my talks from Wings, Wheels & Water to give some 50 talks to U3A groups across the British Isles over the last seven months.)

## **Moving Forward**

As I write, in mid-June, we wait to see if restrictions will be withdrawn at the end of the month – it is not looking too good at present. However, slowly we are moving forward and some groups should be meeting face-to-face very soon. We are intending to have an official 'restart party' in September so look out for the details.

It has, as I said at the beginning, been a very difficult eighteen months and I wish to record here my sincere thanks to all the Committee members and Group Co-ordinators who have done so much, in so many ways, to maintain a busy, vibrant U3A.

**Tim Young,  
Chairman**