

Chair's Report AGM 2023 Angel View Hotel, Gateshead 26th April 2023.

I can't believe it's been a year since I was elected as Chair of Northumbria Region in April 2022 at Sunnyside Club, Sunnyside, Tyne and Wear.

COVID is behind us, hopefully, although some members are still concerned when mingling in large groups.

Much has happened during the past year, as we're now able to spread our wings. Zoom and other forms of technology were a bonus during lockdown and they still remain so in many instances.

Several u3a members from around the area have attended the Region's Committee Meetings to experience a taste of what happens. Some have said it's not for them, which is fine, but two new members have joined our jolly team. They are Ted Watt of Seaham and District u3a and Trevor Robinson of Alnwick u3a. We always welcome new members.

The Northumbria Regional Committee and the Regional Support Volunteers (formally called the Regional Trust Volunteers) have merged to form the Regional Support Team. (RST) The members of the Committee are still Trustees of our charity; however, many roles are duplicated within both teams eg organizing and providing workshops and events, promoting and exchanging knowledge between u3as, encouraging support and development of u3as, encouraging networking within u3as, either by a social and or a learning event and many more.

The RST are using the newly prepared 3 year plan (2023 – 2026) as a basis for their working groups. The 3 year plan is now on the Region's website under the Committee tab. Please look and feedback any comments, as all u3as in the Region have a voice and an opinion.

It was felt important that all u3a members, not just Committee Members have a chance to get to know the members of the RST. Therefore, over the past 9 months u3as in the Region have been visited, whether it be at one of their main meetings or one of their Committee meetings. We've also attended Network Meetings whether it be on Zoom or face to face. So far, we've said Hello to 14 u3as and 6 Networks, to show everyone that Regional members are volunteers, just like all of us. Please invite us to one of your next meetings.

The RST also assist Sandi Rickerby, the Regional Trustee to role out National projects. 'Off the Wall', a festival of learning, is a fine example. The event takes place in May at the Sill, Northumberland. It's open to all u3a members throughout the UK and is proving to be very popular. This is a prestigious event, enabling publicity for the whole u3a movement and also the Northumbria Region. Many fringe activities are available, such as charcoal drawing, Roman food, and the Northumbria Region Creative Writers (NRCW) are hosting two workshops. NRCW published their first book this year and are now placed eighth in the top ten available books from the publishers.

The Region, as forms of communication, use emails via Beacon, the Region's website and now being trialled is a Facebook Page. The Messenger, the Region's magazine was originally printed and available to all u3as. Over the past few years The Messenger has been made available online. The dates that the magazine is available have changed. It is now being produced in between Regional Quarterly Meetings, this gives an opportunity for members to read information about the past meeting and advertise the next one.

The Networks are gaining in strength and provide a vital tool in keeping all u3as up to date. There are now 11 Networks from Chairs, Treasurers, Business Secretaries to IT and Creative Writing. Each Network meets on a regular basis and enables information to be cascaded down to all members. The Network tab on the website provides information.

With regret, several u3as in the Region have now dissolved, not because of the lack of finances, but mainly because they were unable to appoint new Committee Members, especially Officers. It is understood to be a concern for several other u3as in the coming year. On a positive note many u3as are thriving and vibrant, their membership numbers increasing by the month.

Looking to the future the RST will be organising workshops, Interest Group Networks, social and learning events, encouraging u3as to take part in Shared Learning Projects and most of all providing a 'fun' element into everything that's being organised.