

Preston Park U3A, Chair's Report 2021

We paid the price for a relatively normal festive season at the end of last year, with Lockdown 3 which started on 6th January and ran, in its severe form until 28th March. It then continued with the "Rule of 6" until 11th April but from 12th April, joy of joys, pubs were open again but only outside and, of course what happened, it then snowed! Hospitality inside did not restart until Monday 17th May. Freedom day was not until Monday 19th July, In all, seven and a half months of major personal restrictions.

Sadly, we are presently waiting to find out more about Omicron. If it turns out to be a major problem, we may have some more restrictions. I fervently hope and trust this will not be the case.

This report is my review of this year. Another year full of difficulties and restrictions but one in which Preston Park U3A has shown its strengths and come through well. More on that later.

From March some of you no doubt started meeting your friends for outdoor walks in groups of no more than six. However, the practical effect on our U3A was that most Groups could only meet through Zoom meetings until late spring when warmer weather enabled the more adventurous to slowly restart meeting outdoors in person. Sadly 2021 did not have the same amazing spring as last year but because we are U3Aers we made the best of it.

The two walking Groups were more fortunate and able to start meeting again outdoors from Tuesday 13th April and have been walking together ever since. The walking Groups are a great way for new Members to meet existing Members and find out what is going on.

Most of our Groups, one way or another, started meeting again from July onwards and now the vast majority are meeting in person. Whilst Zoom has been incredibly valuable it is no substitute for face to face meetings even if it helped us to get through the worst of the pandemic.

I am conscious that a few Members may still be isolating for personal health reasons. We hope their circumstances improve and they are able to return soon to our U3A.

We are ending the year with as many members as at the beginning, about 416 which tells me that our U3A is offering what Third Agers in our area want. Your committee is not however complacent. We know we have to refresh and improve our Interest Groups which are the essence of our U3A. Eight new Interest Groups have started in the last few months or will in the New Year. They are Art Outdoors, Family History for Beginners, House Plants, Mahjong, Table Tennis, Play Reading, French Conversation and a 2nd Pilates group. I would like to thank all our existing Group Leaders for your perseverance in difficult times and all the new Group Leaders. Without you our U3A would not work.

A year ago, we reduced the annual subscription from £14 to £7. For 2022 it will revert to £14 which your committee believe is good value.

During the year we lost two Committee Members due to personal reasons and three more cannot stand for re-election as they have served the maximum allowed of 3 years. I should like to thank Elaine, Marion and Sarah for all their hard work and know their knowledge and advice will be available in the background when needed.

I should also like to thank the other Officers and Committee Members without whose work your U3A would not run and Ann Kerrison and Roger Luther for their valuable input.

I am sure you will agree we will approach our fifteenth year with hope for better times and the steady return to normality.

Thank you all for your support.

John Colman, Chair 2021, Thursday 2nd December 2021