

## **Chair's Annual Report April 2020 – March 2021**

Looking back on our last financial year brings back memories of seemingly endless lockdown announcements, concerns about rising Covid infections and a lack of social and family contact. We had the days of Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp and heaven knows what else, but I am sure we all look forward to being able to spend more face-to-face time with our U3A friends and colleagues.

While we are still far from our old pre-Covid life styles, the rapid development and roll out of the various vaccines have enabled most of us to return to something resembling normality. It is also good to see that month by month our membership numbers are climbing back up again. As well as welcoming back old members as they resume activities previously halted during the pandemic, it is good to see a steady increase in the number of new members joining our U3A.

As an organisation we have had to meet a high level of fixed costs in our last financial year which have to be covered by the membership fees. Our payments per member to National Office and the cost of the Beacon membership software accounts for nearly half of each individual's annual membership fee! This is before we add in various other annual costs, plus we also have the fixed costs associated with our sole use of the Upper Room in Northam. Rather than lose this facility, we have had to keep paying our annual lease fee for the building despite not receiving any income from its use over the past year.

Not many other U3A branches are lucky enough to have such a facility as we have in the Upper Room. It is not only the major meeting room for our U3A but it is also somewhere we are able to safely store costly U3A equipment which can then be more easily accessed by the various Groups who need to make use of it. During the last full pre-pandemic year there were over 350 different Group meetings held in the Upper Room, all with the added convenience free parking! No other local facility would be as cost effective for Torridge U3A's varied needs.

We have underwritten the fixed costs of the Upper Room from our reserves during the pandemic and will continue to do this until such time as we get back to using it on a regular basis. With Upper Room re-opening, we have put in place improved cleaning and sanitising facilities to ensure the safety of our members using the room. We needed to increase the cost for members using the room from £1.00 to £1.50 per session, as this will ensure that any extra costs involved and all the fixed operating costs remain fully covered.

I would also take this opportunity to express my thanks to the many group leaders who have adapted to new methods of operation and communication to keep their groups as active as possible and to continue social interaction between group members. My thanks also go to all the other members of our Committee for all the hard work they have put in to ensure we have continued to operate Torridge U3A through these very difficult times.

Dennis Pavitt  
Chair, Torridge U3A