

Tu3a Chair's Report 2022-2023

The year has seen us beginning to normalise our activities after the main disruptions of the pandemic, although some mitigations have remained.

Membership

We have slightly increased our membership from 244 to 252. Some members have left whilst others joined, and we have held two get togethers for new members in October '22 and 'April 23. These were attended by 22 members, the aim being to meet in an informal situation, provide information about the activities of u3a and to give members the opportunity to have their queries answered. Feedback from these has been positive, members have commented on the friendliness they have met and how they have enjoyed the groups they attended. To meet with others new to Tu3a therefore appears to be worthwhile and is something we anticipate we will continue.

Two of our newer members who attended the October meeting have now met with local journalists and you will see articles about their experience of joining Tu3a in September in Peebles Life and The Peeblesshire. This is intended to provide publicity about us in a more personal and relatable way.

The monthly meeting

One of the mainstays of Tu3a is the monthly meeting. From October 2022 until May 2023 these took place at St. Joseph's Hall, Peebles. On average forty three members attended in person, with the figure ranging from thirty four to fifty six. Those members attending on Zoom ranged from six to fourteen. For most of the time we were able to utilise Zoom in order that members could participate from home. However toward the end of this year the WiFi signal at the hall became insufficient to enable this. We are pleased to report that the strength and speed of the internet signal has been greatly improved and we hope that all future meetings will include the ability of all members, whether on the internet or in person, to participate.

During the year a varied feature of presentations has been provided. These have featured public information sessions including a talk on scams and online safety by our community policewoman as well as a talk on health and wellbeing by a local Age Concern manager. A presentation by Dementia Friendly Peebles was partly given by two of our members. Also in house were talks on Bridging the Tweed..self explanatory(!) and a University of Surrey Africa Expedition in 1974. Local woman Taylor Winyard inspired us all with her descriptions of her record winning row across the Atlantic in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge. One of the guides from Abbotsford provided a very entertaining and insightful talk on Sir Walter Scott and the house and the talk on Scotland's illicit whisky stills gave us an entertaining and fascinating look at, amongst other things, tax avoidance in earlier times!

We have adapted the serving of refreshments to decrease the chance of Covid transmission and have kindly been lent an air purifier by Christa Hook.

A programme of talks has been arranged into next year and we are always open to suggestions for items which would be of interest.

Interest groups

These groups are the life blood of the u3a and there are currently twenty-six active interest groups – ranging from archaeology to walking. The sharing of ideas and learning from each other is very much our ethos - an organisation of members for members with each group being enabled by a facilitator or two.

With the lifting of Covid restrictions the German Conversation, Russian Literature and Lunch Club groups are up and running again and they would welcome new members. A French Conversation group is in the pipe-line.

Suggestions for new groups are always welcome. Some ideas already put forward are – cycling, pétanque, yoga, more book groups, a creative writing group, more language groups, flower arranging, needlecraft and 'games' including cribbage, chess, bridge and crafts. A get together in the autumn is planned to give members the opportunity to share such ideas.

We are also lucky to have one of the national learning advisors in our Tu3a and Sandra Whitnell will be talking about her role at the A.G.M.

The Committee

At the start of the year we welcomed four new committee members, Helen Narracott and Marsali MacDonald in the role of Groups Coordinators and two in the role of Member without Portfolio, Nancy Norman and Margaret Semple.

We held a meeting for members new to the committee as a basic induction to our roles. With the imminent retirement of Urs Ziltener, Treasurer and Dorothy Taylor, Membership Secretary, we have two vacancies and are fortunate to have nominations for these roles as well as for new members without portfolio.

We have also been grateful for the advice and work of Ian Rodwell, Web Administrator and Jim Strachan Beacon Site Administrator who, under the constitution have been invited ..and agreed! ...to assist due to their special expertise.

The above people also take part, if they wish to, in national meetings and Zoom presentations to keep them up to speed.

However we are trying to establish flexibility in our role as committee members, aware that many of us have other responsibilities, interests and, yes, even work. So whilst working within the constitution, we are aiming to move away from set appointment periods in all roles and to encourage the sharing and shadowing of roles where feasible.

When the new committee is appointed we will publish the names and roles in the bulletin. Please remember you can contact us through the website by role. Names and personal emails are not included on this for privacy reasons.

The Bulletin

This is compiled edited and posted to members at the start of every month and it provides up to date information about our activities. Most members receive it by email but for those not online, it is sent by Royal Mail or hand delivered. It is also available in large format.

The committee have recently decided that the frequency of the bulletin will be decreased after September to once every two months. There are several reasons for this. During Covid the frequency increased as there was much information to share and the situation and advice regularly altered. In addition we have the website and now also our private Facebook page to keep members informed. Of course we continue to welcome any contributions from members.

We will therefore include in each Bulletin the programme for the next two monthly meetings and on a monthly basis we will email a reminder of the subject for the month ahead. For those not on the internet we will either text or send a paper copy.

This will be for a trial period and we invite your feedback on how this is working.

The Website

The structure of this is dictated by u3a and unfortunately much data was lost during the year for reasons totally outwith our control. Ian has worked hard to rectify this and after a

meeting with some of the committee, he also updated the information and continues to do so as needed.

However, there are plans nationally to make significant changes to the site so we await this....but not with bated breath.

Facebook

During the year we have been fortunate to have the knowledge of Helen Narracott with regard to social media. This is another means of communication used by some members. Helen has therefore established a private Facebook page for Tu3a to which only members have access. We hope through time an increasing number of members can use this to publicise their activities.

Volunteers

The work of the volunteers continues. Every month Carol and Jim Ramsay prepare and tidy up after serving the refreshments at the monthly meetings at which Eileen Fletcher acts as host and recorder. Technical support from Paul Bretherick, Douglas Gray, Urs Ziltener and Ian Rodwell has continued throughout, enabled by Susan Rossborough, Programme Coordinator who maintained the Zoom account. We also have a list of volunteers to call on for extra duties.

Annual Outing

We had hoped to reinstate the annual outing in place of the June meeting and arrangements were in place for a trip to Abbotsford and Melrose. Unfortunately there were insufficient numbers and this was therefore cancelled. We do hope to arrange something next year and will consult members about it.

To conclude

As we move towards another year of Tweeddale u3a, now over twenty years old, we still have members from this time and others who have served in various ways over the years. We have to thank all of you who contribute or have contributed to the organisation we now have which provides so many in our communities with learning opportunities, activities, fun and friendship.

Sheila Jackson

Chair

7 August 2023