

## **Tweeddale u3a Report of Chair 2021-22**

### **Introduction.**

Whoever said “change is the only constant in life” was absolutely correct. This last year has been another of evolving advice about the pandemic and all of us adapting in our own ways to this. Though with much in common too, I would hazard.

### **The Changing Year**

As a u3a our priority has been to find ways to ensure we keep going and to continue to promote our aims. Feedback from various groups of members has emphasised the value of socialising with others, as well as learning together, especially after so long with limited contact with people. To this aim, as Covid guidance has allowed, we have developed a hybrid means of returning to monthly meetings. Whilst this has proved challenging at times, and is not liked by all, it has meant that some members can meet again in person and others benefit from being part of the group at a distance. It is our intention to continue with hybrid meetings in the future on the basis that some members may not wish to attend in person due to varying needs, and winter weather can be off-putting for some. It also means less travel for those who live outwith Peebles. Whilst we will follow the guidance of St Joseph’s Hall committee about the use of the room, we hope that the number of people the hall can accommodate will again rise to the maximum of 70 if Covid advice permits. Starting at the AGM, we will once again be providing refreshments, albeit in a different way from pre-pandemic and we will also be giving information about the various groups.

We also offered each interest group £30 if funds were needed to restart after a break through Covid. There has been very little take up of this although the offer still stands. Please contact Urs Ziltener, Treasurer. Urs report will accompany this.

### **An Organisation of Members for Members**

Members have found various ways to continue to meet in their interest groups (currently 26) and the summer weather has assisted...yes really ..at times by, for example, circle dancing, book groups in gardens and in the walking groups.

Our membership has decreased this year to 244 members from 254 last year. Whilst some have left, others have joined in this time, recorded by Dorothy Taylor, Membership Secretary, on an ongoing basis.

Much hard work, time and enthusiasm has been put into ensuring we have ongoing and up to date Covid advice and in developing technical expertise in the setting up and management of the hybrid meetings. Thanks to Christa Hook aided by Peter Moore and Liz Johnson we have benefited from expertise and regular advice about Covid prevention measures and Christa and Marilyn Neal have liaised regularly about Covid safe venues. We have now bought two CO2 monitors which are available for groups to borrow to promote safe levels in indoor settings, thus diminishing the risks of infection.

Paul Bretherick, Douglas Gray, Urs Ziltener and Marilyn Neal have got us to the stage of being more confident about running hybrid meetings despite the ongoing challenges, disappearing speaker, and missing loop system. Yet they have all valiantly carried on! A new laptop and PA equipment has been purchased to facilitate these meetings.

In addition, we are in the process of researching purchasing a mifi, yes mifi, device. This is a way of obtaining mobile internet. Jim Strachan has been giving us the benefit of his experience and advice on this. Mifi is a small, highly portable, cheap and simple means of widening access to venues where no wifi exists and which members could borrow. We'll provide more information about this when we purchase one.

We have paid for zoom accounts for two members who have assisted with zoom meetings. As many groups are now meeting on a personal level again, we will continue to pay for one account.

Ian Rodwell continues to manage our website and is keen to upload any relevant material from interest groups. Jim Strachan has now joined us to facilitate the Beacon system and keep abreast of future u3a developments in this. Once again we are fortunate to have members enthusiastic to help and use their expertise.

In October we met with twelve new members who had joined tu3a in the previous year. Feedback was very positive about the activities available, even if outdoors for most of the time, as well as friendships formed. We are planning another such meeting in October this year for members who have recently joined.

In June we also met with members who were interested in helping u3a in some way. As a result we now have four members who have offered themselves as committee members in the position of Member without Portfolio (2) and Group Coordinator (2). In addition we have a group of twelve volunteers willing to help, on an *ad hoc* or regular basis, with refreshments for monthly meetings, etc. As some of you may know Eileen Fletcher has been acting as our Welcome Coordinator at the monthly meetings for a few months now, for which we are all very appreciative. This response has been very encouraging as has the feedback from those unable to help but who have shown appreciation of the organisation.

The Group Coordinator posts above are to replace Christa and Marilyn who are retiring at the AGM, having served years on the committee. We are very sorry to see them go as their involvement in the running of the organisation has been immense and their constant attention to their roles has made a significant contribution to the success of tu3a. Unfortunately Derek Mackintosh and Fiona McGill retired earlier in the year from the Vice Chair and post without portfolio. We have been unable to recruit to the post of Vice Chair and would always be happy to hear from any member who may be interested and wishes to find out more about what's involved.

As we wish to be as accessible as possible to all who may want to take part in activities, we have undertaken some work on an Accessibility Policy. We want this

to be a practical development which enables all members to participate wherever possible, taking into account our legal responsibility to take reasonable steps to do so, regardless of ability.

We are also working on an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and will also be considering ways to promote this. In addition, our complaints policy will shortly be available on the website.

Susan Rossborough, Programme Coordinator, has arranged a range of interesting presentations at the monthly meetings including Scottish Lighthouses, The Commonwealth Graves Commission, Health in Older Age and The Physic Garden at the Royal College of Physicians. Speakers have all been on zoom. We are aware that some members prefer speakers in person and whilst we acknowledge the importance of this, zoom does extend the range of speakers available. Ideas for speakers gratefully received!

Elizabeth Gray secretes herself away in her office every month to continue to bring us a lively and informative bulletin containing relevant and helpful information about the life of tu3a. As with information for the website please do inform Elizabeth of any items for the bulletin.

The smooth running of tu3a is an aspect which isn't really seen but the role of Secretary, held by Sheena Jones, really does oil the wheels. Sheena quietly and efficiently organises and minutes the committee meetings as well as this AGM, and follows up all the administration.

Rosemary Hamilton continues to act as Care Coordinator to help ensure tu3a extends our sympathy in times of bereavement.

### **Feedback from Members.**

If we are to be an organisation for members we do want your feedback about what we do and any constructive criticism/ideas you may have for improvements. Please contact me personally or, if you have ideas about a feedback forum and how this could work, please also get in touch. We have been aiming to improve our communication with you and hopefully this will become easier as we meet up in person more regularly.

As I come to the end of my first year as chair, whilst the role has had it's challenges (memory being a major one!) I can honestly say I've found it stimulating and educational but most of all I've come to really appreciate the friendship, support and laughs I've had along the way. Thank you for bearing with me.

For those who haven't googled it, (though some of you will undoubtedly know the reference), "Change is the only constant in life" is from the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus, 2500 years ago. Wise person.

Sheila Jackson, Chair

16 August 2022