

# Annual Report for Wellingborough and District u3a for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

## Overview

The year 2020-2021 has provided a challenge for all of us as individual members, group leaders or committee members. On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020, our Committee took the difficult decision to suspend Monthly General Meetings and all other u3a activities due to concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic and the exposure to risk for our members, especially due to the age profile of the organisation and the advice being given at the time. The Government initiated a National Lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 which reinforced the decision which was made.

Throughout the COVID 19 Pandemic our Committee have met regularly on Zoom to try to find ways to support members during this difficult time. In recent months face to face monthly meetings have recommenced with members, who are unable to attend, joining the meeting via Zoom in what is known as a hybrid meeting.

## Activities

Over the months following lockdown interest groups kept in touch in a variety of ways. With the partial lifting of the lockdown some groups managed to meet face-to-face for a short period of time until we went into the second and third lockdowns. Innovation became essential and the use of social media, Zoom/Teams, email, and telephone communications became used effectively.. Some groups managed to link together on a regular basis and new groups were set up specifically to take advantage of the medium of Zoom.

These initiatives show how our members are engaging in lifelong learning by continuing their personal development and undertaking activities that had never previously been attempted. In fact, it provided a double for learning as we all learned to use the different medium of Zoom and then the separate subject that we were learning which included cookery and crafting. Well done to all of our members who have engaged with all of this technology, albeit reluctantly in some cases.

In January 2021 a decision was taken to resume monthly meetings but using Zoom technology. Since that date a variety of speakers have been engaged to talk to our members offering a wide range of subjects. Some speakers are more successful than others in the use of technology. Whilst unable to organise a raffle, each member received a number when registering from which a winner was drawn who received a £30 Marks and Spencer voucher.

It was decided to send out a monthly newsletter to members to keep them advised of what was happening in our u3a. It has been sent out primarily by email with approximately 50 being sent out by mail for members who do not engage with technology. Included in this newsletter are Brain Teasers and three prizes of £10 are offered to members submitting correct entries (correct entries are put into a hat and three drawn out).

## Volunteering

As a cooperative organisation, many of our members volunteer for Wellingborough and District u3a. Just as a reminder, all Committee members and Interest Group Leaders are volunteers. In addition to these roles, volunteers make a major contribution to the success of the u3a in other areas. In times when we are not restricted by the Covid 19 Pandemic these include organising the monthly raffle, serving refreshments, and washing up after our Monthly meetings.

## Constitutional and admin

Given the difficulties associated with lockdowns and the uncertainty surrounding the Covid issues our Committee decided to move the membership renewal date from 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 which gave members an additional 6 month's membership at no extra cost. Several members did not renew their subscriptions and therefore we suffered a decline in membership with 818 members as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 564 members renewing by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Since this date our membership has steadily increased as new members have been signed up and individuals who did not renew by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 have now done so. As of 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021, our membership totalled 626.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 via Zoom. Although the AGM is usually held in September the delay was allowed by the Constitution which permits a delay of up to 3 months. No motions for debate were submitted and a new committee were duly elected.

## Outcomes

From feedback received we know that our activities have assisted members during this difficult time. The ways it has helped is by supporting their morale, exercising their mental faculties, and providing opportunities for socialising with others, albeit virtually.

Our organisation has continued to work well with many groups restarting activities following restrictions being lifted earlier this year. Equally several groups are no longer running but new groups have started during this time.

## The Future

Due to the current uncertainty about the future and what the new 'normal' will look like your Committee have developed policies to protect members as we move forward and undertake face to face activities. Planning is in place to create 'hybrid' meetings where some members can meet face to face whilst others engage via Zoom. This is particularly relevant regarding the Monthly Members Meetings but there are a few challenges to be overcome first. We are working to ensure that Wellingborough and District u3a continues to be a vibrant and active organisation which supports all its members.