

Two years ago, I was elected to be your Chairman for 3 years. Standing here knowing that I am two thirds of the way through that term, allows me to start counting down the number of meetings that I have left.

In all seriousness, Year 2 was every bit as challenging as Year 1, but for different reasons. The latter, as mentioned last year was tarnished with far too much red-tape and bureaucracy (GDPR to mention one) for my liking. I had enough of that kind of stuff during my 43 years of Banking. I joined U3A, as did everybody here I suspect to have fun, continue to exercise my mind, acquire new skills and to meet like-minded people in a relaxed environment, as well of course, to join one or two of the many wonderful groups that this U3A already ran , by some wonderful Group Leaders.

We have continued, during my second year, to enjoy some quality speakers and a variety of events. Even in the face of adversity, when we were let down by a speaker's non-appearance, a quality meeting took place due to the dedication and commitment of 3 members who were prepared to step up to the plate.

For the second year in succession, it was an absolute joy and privilege for Jayne and I to represent Wellingborough at the National Conference and be amongst 450 like-minded U3A members, although sadly, only 2 of 13 Northamptonshire U3As (soon to be 14 with the launch of Priors Hall Park near Corby) were represented.

It was with some pride that we received our 15-year certificate which we will arrange to have framed and exhibited at future meetings. Who knows, we may even go to town and provide some cake in addition to tea and biscuits at one of our forthcoming meetings. Of greater significance, was the award to 12 U3As of their 35 years existence, one of which was formed 37 years ago in 1982 but could not join the Trust until two years later.

As was the case last year, day two was devoted to workshops, all of which were very challenging and thought provoking. Day 3 commenced with a fantastic talk about renaissance art in Florence and the influence of the Medici family before we then proceeded to the formality of the Third Age Trust's AGM, which is not everybody's cup of tea, but a formality that all Charities and businesses have to go through once a year...just as we are doing now!!

It was not all hard work, as there was excellent entertainment on both evenings, including a quiz delivered entirely by PowerPoint on the main projector (which we are going to bring to you at one of our meetings next year), plus the workshops were followed by a choice of pursuit sessions. No surprise that Jayne chose to go into (and, I believe, take over) the magic Group.

I chose mah-jong, but left as they started, as it was clearly aimed at those wishing to learn. Since I already teach mah-jong I returned, disappointedly, to the bar after considering the other options..... almost deciding that there might be something for me in Japanese Encounters. I won't even mention Geisha Girls.!!

I will though, just touch, very briefly on three aspects from the National Conference.

- 1 - Structure of the Organisation
2. Development Plan and Priorities
- 3 - Beacon

As far as the **Organisational Structure** is concerned:

We at Committee Level, are acutely aware that there may be members who are unfamiliar with the National Landscape as far as U3A is concerned.

Currently there are 1050 U3As across the UK comprising 450,000 members. Each U3A is a registered charity, being financially independent (or autonomous if you prefer) and run by an elected Committee. A U3A therefore can manage its own affairs, if it abides by the guiding principles and ethos of The Third Age Trust, the umbrella organisation which governs us all.

The National Office of the U3A is also run by many volunteers, in addition to a small body of just 14 paid staff. It is a rich source of advice, support and materials - available to ANY U3A member by telephone or through their on-line portal.

There are approximately 40,000 Group Leaders!

The landscape is divided up into Regions, each region being supported by a Regional Trustee. We are part of East Midlands and our Trustee is Jean Hogg.

These Trustees and U3A Nationally are supported by approximately 300 Trust Volunteers who may or may not be Committee Members. They are always on the lookout for further volunteers.

There is a layer between the individual U3As and National Level, referred to as Network Links. These are informal groups of U3As who elect to meet 3 to 4 times a year and share best practice etc. They are geographically established (we are a member of the Northants Network), but there is no compulsion for a U3A to be a member of one. We choose to be a member as we have a very close relationship with our contemporaries.

A growth in the sale of U3A merchandise, which has seen turnover exceed the £85,000 VAT threshold has necessitated the formation of a new trading company 'The Third Age Trust Trading Limited', which ensures that the Third Age Trust can continue to act in line with its charitable objectives.

Moving on to the **Development Plan of the Organisation**, little has changed from the priorities I outlined last year: -

Firstly - ***The U3A name***. The word 'University' must remain as part of our Official Name. Not only would the cost of changing be astronomical, it would need every U3A in the country to co-operate.

Our branding however is being updated to reflect what U3A now represents. U3A is a Learning Organisation for older people and we foster a Learn. Laugh, Live culture!

They are urging us all to NOT use the word 'University' when talking to our friends, or anybody enquiring about our U3A, as this is known to be a deterrent to membership. Instead, let's focus on the positive aspects of membership -that we inspire sharing and learning.

'That word' will be restricted in its use by the Third Age Trust, to its communications with Industry and Professional bodies.

Secondly - ***Raising the Profile***.

We were bombarded with lots of statistical data, which highlighted a slowing down in National Growth to just 6%.

East Midlands fares very well as one of the best regions for recruiting new members.

Of note was the fact that under 4% of 3rd agers (estimated at 10m) are U3A members. There continues to be a lack of awareness of “what we are about”.

Many initiatives are planned to help attack this huge untapped segment, some of which (particularly those of you that read Third Age Matters) may well be known to you, -particularly under Social Prescribing and Diversification.

Thirdly - *Supporting the movement*

We have many systems, but seemingly, none talk to one another. The bespoke website, which many U3As use is clunky and restrictive. Our U3A website is inextricably linked to the National web-site and we cannot even make minor modifications to ours, without involving their help and their system is simply not capable of supporting those modifications.

It is the intention of the Trust to bring all systems together over the next 5 years

Supporting the Movement is just one of four project teams, set up to deliver the Trust’s development plan in the medium term.

Systems integration is a huge project for them going forward, as well as an expensive one!

Touching on **Beacon** briefly.

You will be aware of the Committee’s decision to move onto Beacon and hopefully you will have had a chance to learn a little more about it from the recently issued newsletter, but by way of a reminder: -

It is a management programme which is bespoke to the U3A and is the system to which we are moving our records, to enable us to keep up to date and administer our U3A effectively going forward.

In a nutshell it will allow us to: -

- Hold and manage the membership database in a fully GDPR compliant manner.
- Allow our Group Leaders to have access to limited information on their group members to allow them to run their groups more effectively.

- Allow every member access to their own personal record and amend it as necessary.
- Allow the treasurer to run the accounts, which will be much simpler, time efficient and compliant with the requirements of the Charities Commission
- Effective e-mailing to you, as a membership, with one e-mail, rather than our current cumbersome system where we must send e-mails out in chunks of 50 whenever there is a need to reach all of you who ARE on e-mail.

The beauty of the system is the ability of the administrator to set restrictions of access and authorisation levels which will ensure that we comply with our Data Protection Requirements.

350 U3As, representing 200,000 members are already using Beacon with a further 100 (including ours) part way through the migration process.

You may well have heard about a Beacon Upgrade programme. This is due to be completed late next year and it will provide for a system capable of being used by every U3A, if they choose to adopt it.

Moving on.....

You will shortly be introduced to your new Committee, but firstly I would like to give personal thanks to those leaving at this time, following exemplary service during their term of office.

Cherry Scraton, our treasurer, who will shortly be presenting the accounts for the final time, has worked tirelessly to keep our finances in check and to ensure that we are always in compliance with Charity Commission guidelines. She has produced an excellent platform for her successor

Also:-

Pete Burnett, who is always hidden away behind the audience, works wonders with the equipment to ensure that our meetings run smoothly, but, more importantly, looks after our website extremely effectively. We must not forget that it is Pete's wonderful creation that adorns our membership cards.

Thanks both of you. You have both done a great job!!

I think that we should show our appreciation.

In talking about the future of the Committee, our U3A is only successful because of the volunteers that run it.

A common theme that emerged from the Conference is how almost every U3A is struggling to find willing volunteers to act as “Committee Members” or even help with routine tasks such as setting out chairs/ making teas/ coffees, helping at events etc. etc.

We are reminded that each U3A is run BY members FOR the members and that we are ALL volunteers, When we joined the U3A, we joined as a volunteer!

With a membership in excess of 800, we will undoubtedly have qualities and talents that are not known to us but will be invaluable in helping secure the success of our future. There have even been suggestions that our U3A might be too big and ought to be split. That is not going to happen in the foreseeable future. If it aint broke, don't fix it. Our U3A is healthy and vibrant.

Being a Committee Member might appear to be a daunting prospect, which might turn a lot of people off, but my message to you is that your U3A needs you! I will repeat that. Your U3A needs you! Its future depends on you. So, if you would like to know more about being a Committee member, or indeed, if you think that there are other ways that you may be able to help, then please contact me or any of the Committee.

I would therefore like to offer my personal thanks to: -

- The committee members for supporting me, also for working extremely hard for the benefit of us all. You have all been, without exception, fantastic.
- all our Group Leaders for embracing lots of changes, also for everything else that you do.
- you the members for supporting me and the rest of the committee, even when one or two less popular changes have needed to be introduced
- Phil and Anne, our Registration Ladies, who have continued to do a first-class job,

- Maggie and Sheila for their running of the monthly raffle, with continued imagination and fervour,
- Jenny, Chris and Betty for providing the up-front refreshments
- Anyone who happens to help transport people to and from meetings. You are volunteers!

This brings me to the end of year 2 as Chairman.

I look forward to the next year (my final year) immensely, hopefully with a full programme of quality speakers, but most definitely with a good deal more 'fun'..maybe even the odd joke or two!

I mentioned that there are 1050 U3As nationally. I am proud to be associated with what I believe is, one of the best!

Thank you.

