

WANSTEAD & WOODFORD u3a

Chairman's Report 2023/24

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

At the time of writing our membership roll stands at 503 with 57 new members joining across the year, greatly outweighing the number 'lost'. Some things never change of course, and it's important to recognise the invaluable work of our 42 Group Leaders in providing so many interesting activities. Too numerous to list here individually but thanks go to you all. Others have done great work too: Sandie Farthing and Mary Knights in welcoming up to 200 members at our speaker meetings every month, Cathy Daley in running her Book Fair, and Jagdish Jethwa in helping with technical equipment issues. Player of the Match award goes to Val Lord and her team of helpers for resuscitating the post speaker refreshment service enjoyed by so many. She is supported by Ros Hay and Barbara Kelly who shop for the required ingredients.

Sue Bloom retired last Christmas having done an excellent job for some years and is replaced by Sandra Reekie and a small team who have already organised several theatre trips and outings, with more to come as the year progresses.

As ever, the committee worked hard on your behalf during the year. We held 11 meetings through which we managed the strategy and regular business of our u3a. My tenure comes to an end in March when I will be leaving the committee.

It may not be widely appreciated that of the £18 membership fee we collected this year almost a third went to u3a head office in the form of a capitation fee. There is an additional charge to cover the Third Age magazine. The same process occurs every year. This means that the committee has managed to provide you with a wide range of services for about £1 per month per member.

Lastly, and although not a member of our u3a, I wish to pay tribute to John Capsey, the Caretaker at Memorial Hall. He sets out tables and 200 chairs and puts them away every month, as well as all the equipment needed by our speakers. He is unfailingly helpful and enthusiastic and we could not manage without him.

Some things do change after all ...

One big development and a key event during the year was the launch of our new website in January. We undertook this project because the 'old' website had not had any remedial work done for several years as no one was willing or able to do it, resulting in it becoming completely unfit for purpose. In addition, the committee workload meant that something had to be reduced or eliminated and so we decided to stop individual digital mailings and put all communications onto our website. This includes the monthly newsletter (see newsletters page) which will appear around the 25th of each calendar month – sometimes a day or two earlier depending on when the weekend falls. Back copies are available to view on this web page too.

We also decided that to keep within GDPR and our own Privacy Policy we would have a Members Only section which can be accessed by our members using a password. This protects sensitive information such as member names, email addresses, and phone numbers. This Chairman's report will appear on the Newsletters page but the Treasurer report, because it contains confidential information concerning our finances, will be displayed in the Members Only section in a month or two from now. We hope to be able to develop the website further over time depending on the committee's workload. Three months after its launch our new website is averaging about 100 website viewings per day.

Removing the old website was a problem because, 12 years after the event, and unsurprisingly, no one knew or could remember the passwords needed to delete it. It was a bit of a struggle but we finally managed to persuade u3a HO to delete the old website, which has now been done.

As the year end approached our u3a was in serious trouble because of a lack of help at committee level. We made a final appeal – one among several - for people to come forward and help. At an absolute minimum, we had to find a new Chairman. We warned members that if help was not forthcoming the committee would have no option but to begin the process of dissolution according to u3a protocol. Among other responsibilities placed on the committee, this states that a u3a in this situation must first clear any outstanding debts and then pass the balance of funds either to other u3a's or to Head Office.

Fortunately, this situation has now been resolved and disaster staved off for the immediate future at least, but a constant focus will have to be kept maintaining committee numbers. In the current year, many hours of valuable committee time have been wasted on working through possible recruitment options and to have to keep repeating this message.

What next?

Learn, Laugh, Live is the mantra of u3a. Some of the first part of this must be self directed, such as navigating our website. Other learning takes place through the wide variety of interest groups where members can learn new skills and gain new knowledge. Many of our monthly speakers are invited specifically because they can give educational and informative talks. We try to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere for all our members in which to have fun and laugh with friends.

A new Chairman, Richard Barnes, takes over the role from 1st April and will lead our u3a into the future. I am sure he will receive the same level of support given to me during my time in office. Several other vacancies have also been filled and this should ensure we are well placed to manage a wide range of member focused activities into the new year.

The future life of our u3a depends, as always, on what members are willing to put in. As our new website says, all our activities are *for the members by the members*. Nothing gets done unless people freely give their time, energy, and experience for the benefit of others. We will need this dedication to the common good if we are to continue, thrive, and prosper in the year ahead.

With best wishes,

Chris Steward
Chairman