

Fleet and District U3A

Chair's Report for the AGM 2019

Thank you all for coming today.

This is my second report as chair of Fleet and District U3A. It is a privilege to lead such a lively, successful and growing U3A. We are already at 99% of last year's total membership and look forward to welcoming our 2,000th member in the near future.

I have already introduced your hardworking committee. All committee members are also trustees of Fleet and District U3A. They are the people who share the ultimate responsibility for governing our charity and directing how it is managed and run. Our decisions are always based on best advice from experts, thorough investigation by committee members and detailed discussions of the issues as they affect our U3A. It sounds onerous and it is, but it's also enjoyable otherwise we wouldn't do it!

This year the Third Age Trust (TAT) has made a change to the U3A branding logo. They have changed the strapline which sits underneath the U3A logo in all publications. It used to read, 'University of the Third Age' but now reads 'Learn, laugh, live'. It was felt this new strapline better reflects what the U3A movement stands for and is simpler to explain to non-members. Another innovation from TAT is to instigate an annual U3A day, beginning on June 3rd 2020. We will want to participate here in Fleet so volunteers and good ideas please.

The most important occasion for our U3A this year was the celebration of our 25th anniversary. We marked this milestone by holding a Performing Arts Evening at the Harlington. More than 80 performers gave us a wonderful mix of dance, music and poetry. We had a very enthusiastic audience with only one unsold ticket. I wish to thank all those involved in planning and organizing the event but most of all well done to the performers who gave us so much enjoyment. You were all wonderful.

We propose to hold a similar event every two years. It would be super if more performing arts groups or just individually talented members would like to showcase their skills June 2021.

Last year I reported on our investigations into Beacon, a secure data management package offered by the Third Age Trust, and this year I can report that we have made the important decision to sign up and are now successfully using Beacon. Alan Jones, our secretary and Beacon lead, says that the move to using Beacon as our membership, group management and finance system is a significant and positive change for Fleet U3A leading to a reduction in workload for many of us and increased security of our data. The data transfer from our previous data base and the subsequent membership renewal process in June went smoothly. Thanks are due to Mark Hawes who set up and managed our previous data base. All members with an email address registered with us are able to manage their own data in the Beacon

system. They will also receive the newsletter and other important communications directly to their inbox. If you have an email address and are not receiving information from us, please let us know.

Several GLs have begun to manage and communicate with their groups, through Beacon. The advantage is that GLs can be certain that they are General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant within Beacon. They have no need to keep any personal data on their own computers.

This year, the committee is proud of its actions in making our U3A more inclusive. We have a walking group for people who find walking a challenge! Strollers has proved so successful that it now meets every fortnight for a walk and a coffee. There is also a visits group utilising an accessible coach. The group is called Rollers and is for all members whether they use mobility aids or not.

The committee have begun to host a 'New Members' Coffee Morning' each term to ensure all new members have the chance to be properly welcomed into our U3A. If you are a new or nearly new member please come along to any of the meetings to have a chat and meet your committee. The dates for next year are, January 10th and April 3rd. The dates and venues will be advertised in the Newsletter, as you would expect.

I am pleased to report that our general meetings are increasing in popularity with our members. We have enjoyed a varied and engaging set of speakers at the Monthly Meetings here at the Harlington. Ideas for thought-provoking speakers are always welcome. The side-hall with the pre-talk offer of tea or coffee is proving a very popular meeting place for you all as well as a chance to chat with committee members. Our Events Team are delighted with the excellent attendance at everything they organise. What is particularly gratifying is to see the number of volunteer helpers who turn up every time to set up and clear away. We could not exist without you and your generosity in offering your time and effort in the interests of us all.

Overall, our U3A has continued to grow in popularity and we now have 1,905 members. We have 122 groups each run by a dedicated Group Leader and typically a team of helpers to ensure everything runs smoothly. Nothing would happen in our U3A without this hard-working band of volunteers so I will thank them all, on your behalf, for giving up their time and expertise so willingly. Fleet and District U3A offers an impressive range of activities from which to choose but we are always on the lookout for more so if you have an idea for a new group, please let us know! We are particularly grateful to GLs who host groups in their own homes or in the open air as we are rapidly running out of venues to hire. If you hear of any new venues coming 'onstream' please let us know immediately!

One pleasurable duty for the committee is to consider nominees for the award of life membership of our U3A. Life membership is granted for very significant contributions to the work of our U3A. This year we had the pleasure of inviting the retiring GL of the Bridge groups to become a life member. He has been involved in teaching and promoting the game of Bridge

in our U3A for more than 20 years. Due to ill-health he has had to step down from active involvement in our Bridge programme and I know his guiding hand and wise counsel will be missed. He has single-handedly taught hundreds of members to play and enjoy Bridge. Many of you are here today, I am sure. I know you will agree he is a worthy recipient of this recognition of his achievement.

This year I am delighted to report that ten new groups have formed. They are;

1. Creative Writing (a second group)
2. Canasta
3. Italian (a third group)
4. Keep Fit (a second group)
5. Members on their own, MOTO (a second group)
6. Patchwork (returning after a break)
7. Philosophy (a third group)
8. Rollers (accessible visits)
9. Strollers (accessible walking)
10. Ukulele (a fourth group)

The fact that there are so many 'second, third and fourth' shows the U3A ethos is working well in Fleet. We teach each other and when the knowledge and confidence has been passed over the 'student' becomes the enabler and begins a new group, so spreading the learning even further. I am very grateful to all the new Group Leaders for taking on the challenge of setting up new groups and making them successful.

This year several groups have had a change of GL so I would like to say thank you and well done to the nine outgoing GLs.

Group leaders take on the responsibility for organizing and running their groups regularly, most have weekly meetings. I know from personal experience that being a GL is extremely rewarding but it still takes real time and energy and all GLs are to be commended for their generosity and commitment.

Our U3A would not function at all without our committee. As well as meeting monthly to conduct the business of running a charity, individual committee members lead on various aspects of our work. To begin, I will mention those remaining on the committee this year. John Gawthorpe leads on our flagship event each month, the Monthly Speaker Meeting, which is increasing in popularity. Our much-admired Newsletter is skillfully edited by Sandy Redman. Alan Jones, our Secretary, keeps us on the straight and narrow overseeing our official charity business. Neil Morley manages our money to ensure we spend it wisely for the benefit of our members. Fiona Godfrey expertly manages our membership recruitment and renewal processes as well as producing the Annual Programme this year. Barbara Jones is our very hardworking Venues Secretary as well as taking the minutes at our meetings. Jenny Teagle, as

Outreach Secretary, has opened our eyes to additional opportunities to make our U3A more inclusive and welcoming to everyone.

At this AGM, three committee members are standing down. Mike K. Brown has served as Events Secretary since May 2013. All who have appreciated our U3A Quiz, the Christmas lunch, the GLs' lunch, Open Day, Enrolment day as well as many smaller events owe thanks to Mike. He works quietly but very capably leading the Events and Catering Teams to ensure your enjoyment every time.

Leigh Palmer joined the committee in May 2015 as Group Leader Liaison Secretary. With understanding and open-handedness, he has supported all GLs, new and more established, in addition leading meetings and updating the GL Handbook regularly.

Rod Marshall, in his short, but very productive, time on the committee completely revamped our Website before moving to Basingstoke to become a 'hands-on' grandfather.

I know you will join me in thanking all three and wishing them health and happiness in their new-found free time!

Sadly, this year, Pat Welford died after a long stay in hospital receiving treatment for a rare form of cancer. Pat was the very efficient 'first impression' of our U3A in her capacity as Enquiries Secretary. We continue to miss her sense of fun and valuable input at meetings.

You will be delighted to hear that three of the committee vacancies have already been filled, subject to a vote at this AGM. Chris Porter is already in place as our Webmaster. Carol Howlett has agreed to become our new Events Secretary and has been shadowing Mike Brown for some time. Stephen Grosvenor has volunteered to take over from Leigh Palmer as Group Leader Liaison Secretary and is busily learning the ropes already. So that just leaves the Enquiries Secretary role to be filled when a generous member steps forward...

Volunteers are the life-blood of our U3A. Without members willingly giving up their time and effort to guide, teach, support, facilitate, make tea, move furniture and the myriad of other jobs essential to our success we would be nothing.

'Volunteers are not paid – not because they are worthless but because they are priceless.'

Anonymous

Thank you, the members, for all the volunteering you do as leaders and helpers and for continuing to support your committee this year in striving to make this an even more welcoming, forward thinking and successful U3A.

Paddy Powell

Chair Fleet and District U3A

November 20th 2019