

Petersfield u3a Annual Report – November 2020

1. Introduction

I am delighted to present the Petersfield u3a membership with my first Annual Report. As I have said throughout the year, 2020 has been a challenging year and certainly not what any of us expected. Whilst Covid19 has dominated our thoughts and actions for the best part, it has not stopped our u3a functioning and there have still been many highlights and great achievements.

2. Highlights of the past Year

- 2019 Christmas Do
 - This event nearly didn't happen but was a great success due to the input by many members. Over 100 members enjoyed socialising, John Lette's quiz and of course the singalong helped by the mulled wine! I suspect 2020 maybe different.
- Beacon Membership Data System
 - Secure management of members data is critical, so the decision was made to invest and upgrade our systems to the latest u3a specific membership data system – Beacon. Led by John Donlan (IT Advisor) and supported by Linda Hutton and Jenny Thwaites, the transition was smooth and the benefits already evident; our data is more secure, membership information management easier and we can now contact all members by email directly and securely.
- Health & Wellbeing group and Equality & Diversity activity (see report 4. below).
- Internal Communications Project (see report 5. Below).
- 25th Anniversary
 - All the fantastic plans to entertain up to 300 members with professional musicians, Bill Turnbull speaking, followed by a celebratory buffet and bubbles at the Festival Hall had to be cancelled. Obviously, we were all very disappointed, but still celebrated our 25th with the production of an original birthday card thanks to Mike Wallace's design and a few very well-chosen words from our President, Les Jarman. When we get past the restrictions, perhaps a double celebration should be discussed?
- Overcoming the impact of Coronavirus restrictions
 - The management committee has maintained contact with hopefully every member either digitally, by post or through our buddy system to attempt the

very difficult task of keeping everyone informed of what we can/should and cannot/should not do.

- With the prospect of ever extending the lack of face to face socialising and learning, the MC started a program of encouraging more group digital interaction by funding monthly Zoom subscriptions to encourage groups to meet on-line.
- News & Views, now Connect has maintained its bi-weekly updates and lighter articles of interest and fun thanks to editors Les Jarman and Chris Bird and the many member contributors (more please).
- Zoom meetings
 - The take up of Zoom funded subscriptions has gradually increased as the restrictions continued and more groups saw the benefits of “meeting” at least digitally.
 - The MC engaging the IT skills of John Donlan is providing telephone advice and (when we can) one to one digital platform learning.
- Barcode membership cards
 - As part of the Beacon roll out, our new membership cards now have unique barcodes; these can be scanned by group convenors or when entering General Meeting gatherings to immediately record attendance; especially useful with the Covid track and trace when the restrictions hopefully start to ease.

3. Membership

Membership of Petersfield u3a stands at 600 as at today.

On 4th March 2020 Petersfield U3A went ‘live’ with the Beacon Membership Management System. This system has been developed by the Third Age Trust to provide administrative support to individual U3A’s and is in use by over 400 U3A’s. Our existing ‘home-grown’ system had served us well but frequent changes in regulations and the growth in membership meant that the maintenance of the system was an increasing burden. The Beacon system helps us manage membership administration, Groups management and financial reporting.

The Beacon system has proved straightforward to use and has advantages in many ways. It has simplified the renewal process and will provide very useful additional data regarding groups, as well as a quick email facility. The transition was painless from my point of view and now works well.

Linda Hutton, Membership Secretary
John Donlan, IT Advisor

4. Health and Wellbeing

The u3a interest in health and wellbeing has developed over the year and prior to the March lockdown had established regular monthly group meetings led by health professionals. Often these were related to latest research in the field and ongoing links have been developed with:

- QA Hospital - through the Public Patient Involvement section where latest information related to research and development in health can be accessed with opportunities to become involved in research.
- Portsmouth University Psychology Department- involvement by our members in a research project and access to a series of weekly lectures (currently on Zoom).
- Primary Care Network - a talk by the lead clinician and a Zoom Q&A session with the Swan Surgery. Also, we have joined the PCN social subscribing system to provide support to those in their third age suffering from isolation or related condition.
- Participation of members in a number of active research projects including those with the Universities of Oxford and Surrey.

Improving Access and Inclusion

As a result of the increased awareness of health and wellbeing, u3a members have become more aware of issues that may impact on, and be an obstacle to, current and potential members' involvement and learning. This awareness has been mirrored at National Third Age Trust level with the issuing of two template policies related to Accessibility and to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These are currently under review and being adapted so as to be completely relevant to Petersfield u3a. Once complete they will be available to all members for their consideration. The increased awareness of the importance of this area has already resulted in the development of a network of members to support those who have particular needs and requirements that might otherwise prevent them from participating fully in u3a activities. Further work is progressing.

Particular thanks are due to Peggy Pye who has been helping lead on all the health and wellbeing developments.

Andy Borthwick

5. Internal Communications Survey

In late spring, the Management Committee decided it was time to review how and how well we communicated with each other in our u3a. Did members feel they were kept informed? Did we have clear channels of communication? Did members like and use our u3a's publications and website? These questions are examples of the topics we wanted to understand better. A small project team (Peter Lake, Andy Borthwick and Jenny Thwaites) canvassed the views of more than three hundred members over the summer months including three on-line surveys. A substantial proportion of these survey results are available on our website.

There is not space here to detail all of the findings, new ideas and recommendations but illustrative examples are:

1. Members are generally comfortable with the communication but there are some opportunities to fine-tune the way we do things;

2. The trend using electronic devices (from PCs to phones) as the primary means of communication is well-established – any improvements in the way we communicate needs to fully take this into account;
3. Members like and are generally satisfied with the distribution of news and information. They value timeous, short and to-the-point information; and
4. Our website is not presently well-used, but we can expect this to be an important focus for communication in the future – so there is work to be done here.

Whilst this project has given us many ideas for improvements, we can only make changes within our capacity – therefore need members’ help.

We are presently putting together a two-year plan which will include both short and longer-term initiatives that will benefit members. There are going to be plenty of opportunities to take part in fun projects that will enhance all members’ experience and we will be asking you, the members, to be part of this. Please answer the call!!

Peter Lake, Communications

6. Groups

Highlights of the Petersfield u3a Groups

I am humbled by the persistence, camaraderie and ingenuity of our convenors and group members. Many groups have managed to learn, laugh and live despite the circumstances of the last 8 months. Some had the frustration then thrill of mastering Zoom and all have supported each other even when isolated.

One wonderful octogenarian has started an online bridge group during this pandemic, and another has started a beginner’s Italian group on Zoom - ably aided when needed by our patient and effective IT team. What spirit!

Groups in the immediate future can meet in person under restricted circumstances, either indoors in groups of 6 or less, or in Covid19 Secure venues, where numbers are dictated by the venue. This is an ever-changing scenario, and we should all try to be flexible to “meet” on video platforms or the telephone rather than not communicate. Whatever method of belonging to a group is open to you, please ensure you keep in touch with each other, and continue that camaraderie.

Jenny Thwaites, Group Coordinator

7. Management of our u3a

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks to the management committee for their support and commitment given to me in my first year and to our u3a as a whole.

Several long-standing management committee members have decided to stand down at this year’s AGM; Keith Hopper past Chair and Vice-Chair, Esther Jones Speaker Secretary, Heather Nichols New Member Liaison and Colin Smith Press Officer. Whilst all will continue enjoying u3a membership and Esther will continue to search and book speakers for our future General

Meetings, on behalf of the membership, I thank Keith, Esther, Heather and Colin for their work and dedication, past and present.

Peter Lake currently a co-opted management committee member has agreed (subject to your vote) to become a full member and Trustee, we welcome Peter to the committee.

Losing four valuable committee members also creates exciting opportunities; to bring in new, fresh eyes and to re-align the management structure and the tasks necessary to meet our u3a members' future needs.

This process has already started with the introduction of Advisors to the management committee; members with interest/ experience in their field who volunteer their support and advise to the management committee without, necessarily, being a committee member or Trustee. A perfect example is John Donlan who oversees all our IT activity.

As part of the AGM papers, you will have already seen a request and application form for member volunteers to put themselves forward or nominate a member to consider joining the management team, either as a Trustee or an Advisor or simply to support small teams led by others. Please consider helping us and your u3a, we really do need you to help us develop our u3a into the future.

We have identified four key areas which require specific support;

- **Researching both digital and physical speaker content and entertainment for future meetings,**
- **“Buddy” team members to telephone contact and set up friendship groups for new and non-IT members or those simply alone,**
- **Developing our internal & external communication using all forms of media,**
- **Researching new forms of learning platforms for use by existing and newly created interest groups.**

As at today the management committee (subject to your vote) consists;

Steven Watts – Chairman

Robina Whitehorn – Secretary

Gordon Watts – Treasurer

Linda Hutton – Membership Secretary

Andy Borthwick – Health, Wellbeing & Diversity

Jenny Thwaites – Group Coordinator

Peter Lake - Communications

Advisors;

Keith Hopper – Host General Meetings

Esther Jones - Speakers

John Donlan – IT

Peggy Pye/ H&W Group – Health & Wellbeing

Malcolm Muggeridge/John Charnock-Wilson – Science & Technology

Joan Shepley – Arts & Heritage

Les Jarman – President

8. President's Perspective

2020 was set to be the year of Celebration of our first 25 years. The broad plan was to let the new Management Committee learn the ropes, book the Festival Hall, book a speaker (Bill Turnbull) and really get down to work late winter/ early spring. We were on target when along came Covid-19 and all changed.

I, and I suspect many others, wondered whether an organisation that is basically about people meeting people could survive regulations designed to keep people apart. However, seemingly overnight many groups had thought of ways of continuing to function and obey the Health guidelines. Zoom and other videoconferencing services were used to "meet". Most had no experience of this before March and a couple of months later many were completely comfortable with the new technology. Other groups found other ways to function and a minority, for example bridge, scrabble and Singing for Fun, have had to shut down for the time being. But overall things are not as bad as they seemed in March and things are looking hopeful.

Les Jarman, President

9. Constitution

Petersfield u3a is an independent charity (reg. no. 1060354) operating within the framework of the Third Age Trust, the national body which provides administrative and educational support, and of which we are a member. Our operation is governed by a Constitution, and the Trustees, in the form of the Management Committee, are responsible for good governance and adherence to our Charitable Objects.

It is a condition of membership of the Third Age Trust that a local u3a must follow a model Constitution, provided by the Trust and which is agreed with the regulatory authorities. Our present Constitution is based on the model of 2007. Many of you will be aware of legislation affecting the Charity sector in recent years, such as the Charities Act 2011, the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 and the Statement of Recommended Practice for Charity Accounting. The current model Constitution provided by the Trust is dated 2019 and reflects these legislative developments. It clarifies in greater detail the Trustees' responsibility for good governance and regulatory compliance, and the constitutional processes whereby this should be achieved.

In the coming months, it is the Management Committee's intention to seek the approval of the Third Age Trust to upgrade the Constitution of Petersfield u3a to the authorised 2019 model. Subject to their agreement, we will then return to you, the membership, to request formal approval of the upgraded Constitution. Be assured that there will be no change to your terms of membership, or the operation of our social and educational activities; it will however ensure that our governance structure and processes are in good order as we move forward post Covid.

Robina Whitehorn, Secretary

10. u3a Branding

Members will by now have seen the new u3a branding created by the u3a Trust. I hope everyone agrees it looks fresh, modern, relevant and vibrant; just like all our members and our u3a.

11. Thank you

On behalf of all members, I wish to thank an “army” of helpers; Maureen Willett for organising the trips, Chris & Julie Burton for arranging our Chichester Theatre tickets, all those who lead and support our many interest groups, and all the meeting tea makers and receptionists too numerous to mention individually.

I also want to mention Derek Bowtell and Wendy Green who both very sadly passed. Derek arranged our Southbank trips as well as being an active member of our Jazz group and Wendy ran the Scrabble Group; both sadly missed.

12. Future

The immediate future mostly concerns exploring all attempts for members to safely increase social interaction. Through the use of more technology the management committee are already planning combined physical and video streamed general meetings, not only to try and overcome the restrictions but also to reach a wider audience.

We have signed off the continuation of the funded Zoom subscription for any interest group until next Spring 2021 and linked this with agreeing to pay room hire costs for any interest group wishing to safely meet (when we can again) at the Community Centre (or similar priced Covid Secure venue), again until Spring.

During 2021, we will upgrade our membership data system to the new Beacon 2 which brings even more functionality.

Also, as a direct result of the Internal Communications Project, we shall implement some of the short- and medium-term recommendations including improving the current web site to provide both existing and potential members with all the most up to date information about our u3a, all in one place.

Communication in general will be our focus for 2021;

- Regular modern newsletters
- Be-friending
- Web site
- Inclusion & access
- Health & wellbeing
- Digital learning resource library
- Social media
- Meeting content and entertainment

We shall seek to advance our diversity and equality to ensure everyone is welcome and can play an active part in our u3a.

The future is very exciting. However, to achieve all this and hopefully more, the management team will need more volunteer support; your help. Please share your skills with us.

13. Conclusion

I hope you agree, whilst it has been a very difficult year, we have certainly kept going and indeed continued to progress and develop our u3a in many avenues for the better. As chairman and along with my fellow committee members, we remain dedicated to our future and to continue improving all that our u3a delivers to its members.

Steven Watts

Steven Watts, Chairman