



Chairman's Annual Report – 2020-21

1. Introduction

Welcome to my second Chairman's Annual Report covering the period from November 2020 to October 2021. Like last year, this has been an "interesting" and often challenging year. Whilst Covid19 again took centre stage of our thinking, planning and actions, I am delighted that the resilience and determination of all members ensured we remained an active, vibrant, and forward thinking u3a.

2. Highlights of the Past Year

- Despite all the restrictions, we remained a very active u3a. The management committee (MC) were very keen to continue with the Open Meetings and encourage as much interest group activity as possible. Therefore, it decided to fund all online platform subscriptions (such as Zoom) and when we could meet face to face, pay for venue and speaker costs, from our reserves. Both subsidies are on-going until 31st August 2022. Our thanks to the many Group Convenors who embraced the new technology to keep their group alive.
- The Communications Survey (see note 8) was a great success in its implementation and the outputs it generated; most of which have now been implemented. Our thanks and appreciation go mostly to Peter Lake, Andy Borthwick, John Gummerson and John Donlan.
- We are all very aware of the inadequacies of the u3a Trust based web site platform that we use for our own web site. At the beginning of 2020, the Trust planned a new web site platform, however, after significant technical problems, the project was stopped. Therefore, the MC seriously considered developing our own web site which would incur considerable time, effort, and cost but decided first to "exploit" every aspect of our existing web site to ensure it is the "best it can be". This has now been achieved with most members appreciating the updates and clearer design and most importantly, many more members and potential members visiting the site to gather information about our u3a. Please note however, that in time, we shall again be forced to investigate a new web site platform if the Trust based platform is not re-developed.
- Another area highlighted by the Communications Survey as needing improvement was our regular member communications. In the past we had a weekly electronic email with "immediate" news and a termly printed newsletter which looked back and contained lighter articles. Both needed development and therefore:
 - The weekly electronic email was re-branded Connect and was re-developed for easier reading and access; thanks to Les Jarman and Chris Bird.
 - An editorial team has been brought together to develop a brand-new regular News & Views. This is an electronic publication (with an annual printed version) in full colour with news, entertainment, interest group updates and individual member

profiles. Our thanks to Andy Borthwick and his editorial team for developing News & Views so successfully.

- New interest groups continue to be developed (see note 5).
- Another area highlighted by the Communications Survey and needing our attention was how we “welcomed” new members in to our u3a (especially when they first attend our open meetings) and how we ensure members with no IT connectivity are kept informed. A Welcome Team was gathered specifically to address these challenges, and I am delighted that Marjorie Day (who leads the team of 5 members) is already making a very positive impact to our u3a. They have now set up a regular coffee morning in the town, inviting all new members, in fact any members for a social chat and catch up on u3a news. Our thanks to Marjorie and the team.
- We are now trialling the new barcode registration system at our open meetings. This speeds the registration process, checks up to date membership (for insurance purposes) and provides valuable safety data in case of emergencies. We intend to expand the trial to all open meetings and eventually throughout the interest groups on a very gradual roll-out basis.
- The MC is also delighted to announce the appointment of Lynn Battersby-Vogt as Speaker Organiser, taking over from Esther Jones. Lynn has experience of researching and booking speakers for other organisations and we look forward to a stimulating calendar of talks and presentations at our General Meetings. Our thanks to Lynn for volunteering for this vital role.
- Unlike many u3as, Petersfield u3a has succeeded in maintaining its membership levels at about 600. I am convinced this is due to the levels of communication we maintained during the restrictions and the determination of most of the interest groups to keep going, using whatever resources to meet on-line. Our thanks to every member for their resilience during the past very difficult 18 months.

3. On-going Challenge

The main challenge we face as a u3a is the lack of volunteers for various essential roles within our u3a and succession. As I write this report we urgently need:

- Members to publicise our u3a through existing and new media,
- Members to support the hosting and existing projection and sound team at the open meetings,
- Members to support John Donlan and the IT team,
- Members to start new interest groups and succeed current convenors,
- Members to join the MC as Vice Chair, Access & Diversity lead and to add breadth of experience and for succession planning.

The u3a movement only exists and thrives based on every member contributing a little time and energy to their u3a. Petersfield u3a has an excellent volunteer MC, but currently only consisting of 7 members; far too few for any succession planning or to sustain the level of development achieved this year. We have brilliant advisors, many small teams of supporters and exceptionally dedicated Group Convenors, but again we cannot rely on these wonderful people to go on “doing” forever. We need new volunteers to step up. Without them, we shall stop developing and, like so many other u3as, even face the risk of closure.

Personally, as Chairman, I am now two years into a maximum three-year term (as determined by our constitution) and currently there is no Vice Chair/ successor. The charity rules state that if there is no Chair there is no Charity, so we have 12 months' notice that we must find a new Chair by October 2022 or our u3a will close. With 600 members, there must be at least one to succeed me.

A member can be co-opted to join the MC at any time during the year (being ratified at the subsequent AGM) but, the time is now to contact Robina Whitehorn, Secretary to at least discuss becoming a new MC member or volunteer in whatever capacity.

4. Membership

2020-21 saw a fall in membership which was not surprising in view of the pandemic. However, so far, with this year's membership renewal process almost complete, most members have renewed and there has been a satisfying number of new members who have joined. Therefore, overall, Petersfield u3a membership has remained static. With reports from other u3as losing 25% or more members over the last 18 months, we are delighted to have maintained our membership which is due to our management, convenors, volunteers and of course our loyal and patient members.

As at today we are 600 members.

5. Interest Groups

Groups that could, continued throughout our lockdowns, using on-line platforms such as Zoom. Many groups are now operating face to face, but some understandably, are more cautious. Others have opted to increase the venue size for added distancing.

We have had new groups start during this year despite the pandemic. Four examples are an interesting new French Social Conversation group, a Nature Walking group, Café Philosophique group starting in October plus a highly successful 'Pétanque/boules' group. The latter started in July and reached a dizzy number of 31 participants over the summer!

We are hopeful that new group Convenors will step up to run 'Singing for Fun' and 'Play-reading' which have been dormant for some months, and whose convenors do not wish to continue.

I am optimistic for our future of our groups as we strive to create more interests and groups and continue to update our methods of communication and embrace new members.

6. General Interest/ Science & Technology/ Arts & Heritage/ Health & Wellbeing Roundup

- General Interest

The General Meeting continued reasonably successfully on a Zoom platform during the year, regularly achieving 25/40 member attendances. With the restrictions lifted in June, we decided to go back to physical meetings in September. Our first meeting achieved an attendance of 100 members which was overwhelming.

The success of our General Meeting is as a result of the work by an excellent volunteer meeting team who ensure the speaker, facilities, registration, projection, sound, and refreshments are all spot on. With several of the previous meeting team stepping down, the remainder need new volunteers to come forward.

- Science & Technology

The audience may be split over the value of Zoom video conferencing but for the Science and Technology group it showed its true value during the last year.

We initially thought it would be difficult to organise and find speakers but in fact we were overwhelmed by the number and the quality of speakers presented to the group.

Petersfield and Waterloo u3a's collaborated and invited our respective members as well as Liphook u3a which has long term association, so we were blessed with almost 2 talks a month rather than the one we usually organise.

The University of Portsmouth did us proud with 8 of the 15 presenters including eminent professors in a diverse range of subjects from extreme environmental physiology to use of drones for research.

Many of these were recorded and are still available through the website: <https://u3asites.org.uk/petersfield/page/105657>.

- Arts & Heritage

The last 18 months or so have been difficult for all of us; as a group we had a lot planned for 2020, which all had to be cancelled, including the trip to Brighton Pavilion and the proposed three-day break in Sutton Hoo.

For a while we didn't do very much but eventually with the assistance of John Donlon and the MC, we were able to start holding meetings via Zoom, which proved very successful (most of the time!) Esther Jones really stepped up to the mark, managing to get us speakers who were happy to work on zoom.

Now in September 2021 we have finally been able to start our live meetings again and our first speaker was the ever-popular Alexandra Loske, who talked to us about "Fierce Creatures – Animals in Art". Everyone who attended thoroughly enjoyed the talk, but mainly it was really nice to be able to get back to some semblance of normality!

We are still in the planning stages for 2022, but we hope to be able to organise at least two trips. Sadly, it is unlikely we will be able to re-arrange the Brighton Trip, as the particular exhibition we were to see is leaving the Pavilion by 20 January 2022.

Here's hoping that the next few months will see us all raring to go again!

- Health & Wellbeing

There was only one meeting of the HWB group during lockdown and that was a question-and-answer session via Zoom with Dr Laly, one of the GPs from the Swan Surgery, who answered members' questions relating to Covid.

In June as the restrictions lifted, Phyllida Carr kindly invited the group to her house where we enjoyed a very healthy cream tea in her lovely garden. So good for health to meet in person. Unfortunately, the HWB group is no longer able to meet in the Physic Garden, therefore, all future meetings are now held in the Community Centre on the third Tuesday in the month at 2.00pm. The main advantage of the change of venue is that the meetings are now open to all members of the u3a.

The first open meeting was in July, where we enjoyed a very interesting talk from Sharon Court who is the Patient and Public Involvement Facilitator at the QA in Portsmouth, on public involvement in medical research. More talks are planned for this autumn on nutrition, architectural design for the elderly and from the Rosemary Foundation.

All members of the u3a are welcome at future meetings – as are suggestions for future topics!

7. Management & Support for our u3a

Firstly, I must praise the individual members of the Management Committee who I am certain all 600 members will also applaud. Throughout this last year we have been a team of just 7 members/ trustees, all of whom have voluntarily worked hard to ensure our u3a remains as “open” as possible and has continued to improve and develop. Their support for me as Chair and their focus on our u3a has been unwavering.

As at today the Management Committee and Trustees (subject to your vote) consists:

Steven Watts – Chairman

Robina Whitehorn – Secretary

Gordon Watts – Treasurer

Linda Hutton – Membership Secretary

Jenny Thwaites – Group Coordinator

Peter Lake – Communications

Andy Borthwick – Health, Wellbeing & Diversity has decided to stand down from the MC. I would like to record my personal and the MC's thanks to Andy for the 8 years of wonderful contribution to our u3a and support of the MC. Thankfully, Andy will continue his numerous activities off the MC.

I also wish to thank our advisors, convenors, and the many volunteers working behind the scenes; without you all our u3a would simply not exist.

Advisors:

John Donlan – IT

Peggy Pye/ H&W Group – Health & Wellbeing

Malcolm Muggeridge/John Charnock-Wilson – Science & Technology

Joan Shepley – Arts & Heritage

Marjorie Day – Welcome Team

Connect Editorial Team

News & Views Editorial Team

Lynn Battersby-Vogt – Speaker Organiser

As noted above, Esther Jones decided to stand down as Speaker Secretary after many years of excellent contribution. On behalf of the MC and the membership, we thank Esther for her efforts.

Honorary President:

Les Jarman

8. Communication

We conducted a member survey in 2020 that highlighted the need for effective communication as well as the importance of embracing the opportunities offered by available technology. The MC, convenors and volunteers have worked on delivering its recommendations over the last year for example:

- Using new technology to support communication

Our membership has become accomplished in the use of Zoom and similar technologies, to the extent many groups have been able to operate and thrive during lockdown. That's a great achievement.

Similarly, our AGM offered convenient at-home electronic voting for the majority of our members (we did ensure the few members that are unable to e-vote were also able to vote). And, of course, the AGM was totally Zoom-based. It would be difficult to imagine just a couple of years ago that we would have been able to develop these competencies so quickly!

- Keeping members informed

Responding to requests for a regular newsletter to complement our weekly Connect bulletin, we created a Newsletter Interest Group. This group met only using Zoom and has now published three News & Views newsletters which have been very well received... and more are on the way.

- Communication hub for members and public

Our website must be the place where members can find everything they need. It must also be our 'shop window' for potential members. This year, we focused on our website's importance as a communication hub for our u3a. A volunteer website team has worked hard over several months during lockdown to look at the website's every detail. It has been adding and refreshing information to better meet our needs. The refreshed website went live in early summer and the enhancements have already led to increased interest from members and public alike. One learning point: our website will need continual updates (volunteers willing) to keep it fresh and interesting and relevant, so there's still plenty more work to be done.

- News & Views

We have launched a revised version of News & Views in response to a request by members. The survey undertaken last summer indicated a need for more general information about our u3a groups, their activities and, indeed, other individual members. An editorial team of five has now produced three issues with contributions from a range of convenors and individual members. We plan to send out four or five on-line editions per year using desk-top publishing software, which the editorial team have been learning. The editorial meetings are fun - so far, they've all been completed on Zoom and the team has never met face to face as it was formed during the restrictions. We would love to welcome more contributors, photographers, proofreaders, etc. just contact the team and discuss how you would like to join in. Experience of desk-top publishing is not needed but if you would like to learn it would be great to hear from you. It's not difficult - if we can learn it anybody can! Apart from contributing to the production of News & Views it would enable you to impress friends and family by producing your own Christmas cards, wedding invitations, and illustrated stories for your grandchildren! Advert over but please join us.

9. Constitution

In my Report last year, I stated that it was the MC's intention to seek the approval of the Third Age Trust to update the Constitution of Petersfield u3a, dated 2007, to the authorised u3a 2019 Model. The Trust has subsequently issued a further revision, in consultation with its solicitors, and the present authorised Model Constitution, dated February 2021 not only reflects all the relevant legislative developments of the past 10 years, but also gives Constitutional framework to the procedures necessitated by the pandemic. Some of you may already have gone through a similar process in other societies and organisations. These additional clauses will futureproof individual u3as going forward including an option for electronic business processes, online meetings, and proxy voting. The latest Model builds on that of 2019 in giving greater clarification of the Trustees' responsibility for good governance and regulatory compliance, and the constitutional processes whereby this should be achieved. The Trust has recommended that all u3as adopt the 2021 Model.

The MC now intends to apply formally to the Third Age Trust and the Charity Commission for permission to adopt the Model Constitution dated February 2021. I assure you that the final decision rests with you, the membership, and the upgraded Constitution will be submitted to you for approval and adoption at the AGM.

10. President's View

For clarity, the role of President in Petersfield u3a is an honorary one, for which I thank you. Whilst the President is an officer of the u3a he/she has no executive role and is not a member of the MC. Views expressed in the following should not be taken as those of the MC. They are the author's personal opinions.

If 2020 was the year of dealing with change due to covid-19, 2021 has been the year of using the opportunity to implement and develop. Notables are the changes to the website, the publication of a revised colour edition of the bimonthly newsletter News and Views, the use of the national u3a software Beacon email system, and the volunteering of our members at covid-19 vaccination sessions. Inevitably at a time of change there have been disagreements and misunderstandings, but all have been solved amicably with concession and compromise.

The website is the fourth version. It uses the Trust's "u3a sites" software and is now much more informative than its predecessors. There are those who wish to pay and develop yet another state-of-the-art version but why when the present version is more than adequate for a small organisation of 600 members. News and Views, distributed via the Beacon system, is streets ahead of the former version but it is to be hoped that sufficient copy can be found in the longer term.

When we were asked by Petersfield Lions Club to help with volunteer work at the Covid-19 jab sessions at Petersfield Festival Hall, thirty members came forward. Overall, there are 140 volunteers. Sessions have run since last December and to date we have supported 66 clinics, with approximately 40,000 getting a first jab and 36,000 having two. This has helped 90% in our catchment area to get one jab so far and 80% getting two. The programme is going to carry on until just before Christmas and all the u3a volunteers have agreed to stay on the list until then.

Let's hope for a calm autumn and winter and a normal 2022.

Les Jarman, President

11. Future

Every member hopes that the next 12 months will be putting everything Covid behind us so that we can all get back to enjoying our lives without fear or restrictions. Within the MC's planning, we are focused on re-opening and returning to normality.

Amazingly, as well as continuing to operate, we achieved great developments to our u3a in 2020-21 and with the limited resources and volunteers at this stage, 2021-22 will be a year of consolidation rather than continued development.

The major concern for our future is succession planning. I have already documented the urgent need for member volunteers (see note 3) to step up in time to not only succeed my role as Chair but also to join the MC, become new convenors, advisors, and helpers. The u3a is a "by members for members" organisation which will only continue to exist as long as there are willing volunteers. We have been warned.

12. Conclusion and Thankyou

Yes, another difficult year but a satisfying one of achievement. Thank you to everyone who contributed and thank you to every member for continuing to be a member despite the difficulties.

Steven Watts

Steven Watts
Chairman Petersfield u3a

September 2021