

## Woodstock & District u3a - Chairs Report – 2025 AGM

My second year as Chair saw the u3a committee going into the summer of 2024 enthusiastically taking opportunities to promote the organisation and support as many on-going activities as we could.

We took a stall at Kidlington Gala Day (fun but quite tiring) thanks to Penny, Susan, Terry and myself for their work there – we couldn't side-track Andy from his own honey display. Throughout the year I was able to submit monthly pieces to seven local resident magazines and have built up good relationships with editors – much more could be done if we had a Press Secretary come forward.

Posters go up on local notice-boards wherever we can find members willing to do this and refresh regularly. And we now have Pat taking on social media - with monthly posts to local Facebook about the speaker meetings. We flew the flag, or dressed the tree, for u3a at the Christmas Tree charity events at St Mary's Kidlington and at the Methodist Church, Woodstock – again thanks mainly to Andy.

Back to the beginning of the u3a year – we had the Summer Party in August when 75 attended. A lovely afternoon at St Hugh's here, with cakes given generously by members and consumed gratefully. There was Terry's special summer punch and tea deftly served by Jackie and Suzanne for whom we own gracious thanks for all their work every month in dealing so beautifully with afternoon refreshments – they take a weight off my mind.

Last year we became aware that our website would cease to be technically supported by the end of the year. We discovered that the u3a Trust had this all under control and a new parent site for all branches was being born. We determined that Andy enjoyed technical conundrums - and so he was talked into taking on Webmaster for the new site. We were in the last batch of branches to change over. So with myself and Janet in tow - we gulped when told that we needed to complete a training course – taking an estimated 70 hours. Thankfully Andy and myself didn't take that long. The project was very professionally organised, and with Janet we decided on consistency of presentation for the groups and managed to fill most pages with updated information. You will have seen the current pages of the website on the screen today. It is important for us to keep the information relevant and are keen to promote and support the use of blogs where possible in order to present ourselves as forward looking. The website is a huge asset in the presentation of our information to the public and to members. Various documents and policies are now there including Constitution, Insurance, Data Policy and soon to have Safeguarding Policy. We are very grateful to Andy for all his work and enthusiasm.

Even with our super updated website, we still feel it worthwhile to print the yellow programme cards. These can be handed out to anyone who may express an interest in the u3a but is only as up to date as when it was printed and it takes considerable work to produce.

The email newsletter serves to remind members of each month's speaker meeting and apart from one blip – I hope you agree that the speakers this past year have been excellent – with thanks to Gill for booking and organising. A thank you to Andy for stepping in at the last minute in January with his talk on Honeybees, and also to Alan for producing a quiz last month. We experiment with using the microphone here – maybe we/I/others need more practice....do let us know – we do our best. David's management of tables and seating setup each month is never taken for granted and is essential for the smooth running of the speaker meeting. The newsletter importantly gives a

flavour of what is happening in our groups and I rely on information being sent to Janet and myself in order to make it timely and of interest. It is also an alert for the Thames Valley Network zoom lectures and any member can link in the TVN website itself for further information.

We were pleased to receive further requests from group leaders for small portable equipment grants this year. As always it is the storage and care of equipment which can be problematic but we are confident these items will be properly looked after. Penny will be giving more detail shortly. This is my time to specially thank Penny for her responsibilities as a fellow Officer and for keeping the finances straight in such timely and efficient way. I also wish to thank our member Margaret Orme for checking the accounts at the end of the financial year.

We have had several new groups begin this year and Janet will talk about this in more detail but it is the nature of u3a that some groups open whilst others fold - new members bring in new ideas and new energies.

An innovation this year, on suggestion of a member, was a Group Leaders meet-up – naturally a few cakes were involved – that is another story. Suffice to say that it gave us an opportunity to talk about support generally, to discuss some issues, and to think about how we deal with all the different ways of working. We all learnt much and would hope to arrange a similar event in a future year. But thanks to Janet for managing this event, and to Susan and Andy for their considerable assistance, and also Pat giving time to catering duties at the last minute. I am reminded recently that there are national specialist advisers for many of the interest group subjects and they are keen to assist.

Membership is so ably managed by Susan Brett – in between her many group leader roles and participation. A dab hand in high level administration herself which brings huge benefit to our organisation. Susan is also generous in lending out her home for committee meetings.

As mentioned we link to the u3a Thames Valley Network which organises lectures each month. We pay over capitation to the u3a Trust of £4 for each member, benefiting from their top level organisational support including of course the new website. Summer Schools are making a comeback after the Covid years. All this information and much more is available on their websites and through the printed magazine TAM (Third Age Matters) subscription. It is a good read and recommended – if you do indeed have any spare reading capacity left in your month.

I ask you to remember that the u3a is a community organisation run by its members for its members – we are not a social service, and we need some more help at committee level. We have had six committee meetings this year – a lot of business but also a lot of fun and thankfully Pat came on board last year as Minutes Secretary. We are achieving but could achieve more and under less pressure with some more help. A Press Secretary please – it wouldn't be something I would naturally volunteer to do myself but have had to cover temporarily, and yes I've learnt a lot but would be so happy to hand over. Relationships are built and there is humour in much of what we do - at the end of the day this is all a hobby.

I wish to thank Terry for his great support during my two years as chair – I will have a further year to run and I will miss him.

So as we wind up this year with reports from my committee colleagues – please consider if you would be willing to come in as a Vice Chair – we can have two, or as a Press Secretary. Everything is managed by email and mostly its fun – it certainly expands the mind.