

Bourne U3A – Trustees’ Report 2020-2021

This has been a strange year, not least because the pandemic delayed last year’s AGM until September, and we are having the 2021 AGM just 8 months later. Again, we are forced to hold the AGM on Zoom, but we are now much more accomplished at virtual meetings.

Your Committee, the Trustees, have been very busy throughout the last year trying to maintain Bourne U3A as a thriving community organisation. Martin Adkins, our Webmaster has created a new website. This was an important part of our strategy to communicate with members and the wider community. It has received well over 2200 visits since September 2020. It hosts recent copies of the Newsletter in addition to providing information about our groups and details of future General Meetings. A dedicated Coronavirus page has provided links to SKDC, Government and NHS sites and a Downloads page links to all policy documents and forms used by Bourne U3A.

The Committee purchased a Zoom Pro licence and introduced Zoom General Meetings in August 2020 before holding a successful AGM in September with 68 people attending. Since then, we have held a General Meeting every month and attendance has built to healthy numbers. 54 devices logged into March’s meeting involving an estimated 85 members. Gill Stoneman has done an excellent job attracting quality speakers who are willing and able to deliver talks on Zoom. So far, in 2021 we have had talks on local charity, The Friends of Nyansakia, the architecture of Lincoln Cathedral, the social history of Department Stores, and Afghanistan.

It is worth remembering that in March 2020 many of our members had never heard of Zoom and even fewer had used it. Committee members have held several training sessions on Zoom for both speakers and members. A simple guide to using Zoom was emailed to all members with the internet in May 2020 and more comprehensive Zoom instructions for both Group Leaders and general members are now in the Documents section of the website. We must record our thanks to Phil Adams for his hard work in producing this detailed, and importantly, easily understood, guide.

Where and when permitted by Government regulations, several groups met physically in members’ gardens or, in the case of Drawing and Painting, the War Memorial grounds. When this was no longer possible, several groups continued to meet by using Zoom. These included Men’s Cooking, the Railway Group, Green Bowls, Nosh and Natter, Science and Technology, Any Time Out, Creative Writing 2, and Wine Appreciation 3. More traditional methods of communication have also been used to keep in touch with members as group leaders have telephoned their members and volunteers have delivered hard copies of the Newsletter to those without the internet. Several groups, like Green Bowls and Jazz, also keep in touch by email.

Where they have booked an external speaker, the Science and Technology and Railway groups have also invited the general membership. This has increased the opportunities that all members with internet access have, to participate in U3A activities.

One of the losses of the pandemic has been the ability of our members to share communal activities, and this was particularly felt around Christmas. As some form of compensation, the Committee paid for all members to have access to a videoed Christmas concert of traditional music and readings from Norfolk folk group, Hexachordia. This was well received by the membership and generated the highest number of positive emails the Chairman has received in the last two years. On Saturday 6th February we held our first Lockdown Quiz with 36 devices logged on and approximately 50 members attending. Members enjoyed it and generated another raft of positive emails. Thanks are due to Pat Howes and Tony Gray for the organisation.

The various lockdowns over the past year have given us limited opportunity to play our normal role in the community, but we have been active in making members aware of the community support for vulnerable and self-isolating households. The Committee purchased a vacuum cleaner for general use, and this has been made available to Wake House. In normal times several of our groups make good use of Wake House which is an excellent facility for the whole town. The drawing and Painting Group are exploring the possibility of using an empty shop in the town to stage an art exhibition. The idea is to brighten up a sad looking part of the high street, bring a little joy to shoppers, and publicise the benefits of U3A membership.

Lockdown has made it impossible to undertake recruitment activities, and it was inevitable that our membership would decline. Each year in April, our membership declines by about 60-70 as a result of some members failing to renew for various reasons. We usually more than make up this number with new members during the year. However, this year our membership stands at 542, just 20 members down on last year. I think the relatively high level of renewals is a testament to the hard work of our Membership Secretary, John Owen, and our Group Leaders. Members of the Committee must also be thanked for their efforts to continue making Bourne U3A an interesting and worthwhile organisation in the most difficult of times.

The outlook this May is more positive than it was last year with over half the country receiving at least one vaccination against Covid-19. Nearly all Bourne U3A members will have received their first jab, and the majority will have received the second by the AGM on 17th May. Whilst we must continue to be cautious, the prospect of returning to physical meetings and normal group activities before the end of the year is a real possibility.

I think all members are to be congratulated on weathering the storm and keeping a viable organisation going. As we emerge from the trials of the last 15 months with a new Committee and John Owen as Chairman, we can look forward to a thriving U3A, meeting old and new friends, and the opportunity to Learn, Laugh and Live.

Malcolm Scriven
May 2021