



Chair's report to AGM, 2015

As we enter our third year, we can certainly say that Islington U3A is an established part of the Islington landscape. Over the past year, our membership has grown by 45% to more than 400 members and 10 new groups were established, bringing the total to 45. And our programme of monthly meetings continues to attract a large number of members to hear a wide range of excellent speakers.

Monthly meetings

Indeed, we are very fortunate to be able to have speakers who are outstanding leaders in their field. Undoubtedly, the highlight this year was the June meeting when Claire, aka Grayson Perry, told us that inspiration was for amateurs. Other brilliant speakers included Dame Esther Rantzen who spoke about Childline and Silverline, Professor Steve Jones on Nature, Nurture or Neither, Professor Lloyd Peck on the Wonders of the Antarctic and novelist Sarah Dunant on the Renaissance. I'm sure we would all like to thank Julie Howell, the monthly meetings organiser, and Gwen Ovshinsky and Roberta Levenson, who created this wonderful programme.



Groups

Interest groups are also at the heart of what we do. With 45 flourishing groups run by our committed and talented group coordinators there's so much variety and choice for us to enjoy.

The new groups set up last autumn, the science and the current cinema groups, have become well established. And during the year, the number of generalist book groups has doubled to 4, and a 5th is on the way. In addition two specialist book groups, a French book group and a science fiction book group, have also started.

The weekly pétanque group is very popular as is play reading which now has two sessions for each play to accommodate all its members. And the fringe theatre group is regularly sampling new venues across London.

The value members place on getting out and about is reflected in the addition of the bird watching group and the greater frequency of walks, with the longer walks now being weekly and the new shorter walks group already providing 2 walks a month. And the French basic conversation group added a new dimension to 'getting out and about' with their visit to Avignon in June.

We know there is much demand for further French conversation groups in addition to the current two. Unfortunately, so far we have been unable to find coordinators for them. We do keep looking and hope to make more progress this year.

Barry Mason our first groups coordinator who did so much to establish our superb range of groups resigned in March and Sue Welsford took on this very onerous role. In addition to her day-to-day support for groups and group coordinators, she organised the Open Day in October that went so well, with nearly 250 people coming to it, of whom around 90 met us for the first time. So many thanks to Barry and Sue and all the group coordinators

Getting to know each other

Last year's survey of members' views identified that in addition to meeting other members at the monthly meeting and in your interest groups, you would like other opportunities to do so. So it was perhaps not surprising that tickets for the pub quiz in January sold out very quickly. The questions certainly challenged us, the competition was fierce and the result was close and it was all great fun. As it was such a success, we are doing it again this coming January and tickets are on sale today.

A second innovation was the coffee mornings, hosted by members around the borough. The aim is to keep them local so that members can get to know others who live nearby. They have proved so popular that we are now aiming to have one a month, so a big thank to all our kind hosts and to Priscilla Newman who organises them.

The summer party in the beautiful Olden Garden, a community garden near Drayton Park, on a glorious summer evening was enjoyed by over 80 members. The conversation flowed as we ate delicious canapés

and drank sparkling wine or elderflower and got to know lots of new people.

Last week over 100 of us went to see *Dinner with Friends* at the Park Theatre at Finsbury. Before the performance, Park Artistic director Jez Bond gave us a fascinating talk about how he became the Park's founder and how he goes about constructing its programme. The evening was superbly organised by Sue Welsford, who is also the theatre group coordinator.

Communications

Good communications are vital for any organisation. Our three major routes for keeping members informed about what we do are the website, the newsletter and the bulletin.

Website manager Alan Cranston has continued to develop the site over the year and it is now very comprehensive. Over the last few months, Derek Harwood has also been involved in updating the group pages. You will have seen that Alan is not standing again for the Executive Committee and he has told us that he will be stepping down as website manager in March. So we will need to find a replacement for him. Unfortunately, he's unable to be here today for us to show our appreciation for the huge amount of work he's done to ensure we have an outstandingly good website.

The quarterly Newsletter contains major news items and announcements about our future programme, as well as reporting on groups' activities and key events.

Vivien Goldsmith who established the Newsletter's design and style resigned from the committee in September and Anna McKane has edited the latest issue. A big thank you to both of them for producing such a lively and readable publication.

The fortnightly Bulletin provides information about the next monthly meeting and other forthcoming events and new groups in formation. Also, as many members wish to volunteer for local organisations or as subjects for university research studies we include these opportunities too.

Celia Ballantyne has brought us into the modern world through our Facebook page and Twitter account and keeps our friends and followers informed about what we are doing. And this year, Islington Tribune has twice reported on our activities.

Attracting new members

Any vibrant organisation requires a regular influx of new members to bring new ideas and energy, so we need to make sure that potential members know we exist. Existing members play a key part in telling others about iU3A. In addition, membership development coordinator Margaret Wearing has led an active programme of engagement with local voluntary organisations, Islington Council and Whittington Health.

Last year we obtained a grant by Islington Council to support this work. We used part of it to fund the printing of our lively and eye-catching leaflets and posters, which Anna McKane wrote and were designed for us free of charge by Good Impressions. In addition

it meant we were able to advertise our 2nd Birthday Party and Open Day in both the Tribune and the Islington Gazette.

It is very pleasing that these efforts have produced a strong response and our membership has reached such a healthy level.

Part of our local community

There are nearly 1000 local U3A's across the UK. Just as local areas have their own characteristics so do local U3As. So while the underlying structure is the same, each one is unique with its own ethos and approach. In Islington, we not only focus on our own organisation and activities but we also look outwards to the wider community.

Islington Giving is a local charity that funds projects to reduce poverty and isolation in the borough. In June, we participated in their fund raising week. Led by longer walks coordinator Martyn Waring, 30 members walked all or part of the borough boundary. Many others donated via our website so that in total we collected over £1,300. A further £290 was raised by the craft group's sale at the Open Day of items they had made.

We chose the Park Theatre for our theatre outing not only because it has excellent productions but also to support a local community theatre that does not receive any Arts Council funding.

This year for the first time we collaborated with the Archway with Words literary festival in a joint event at

which Joan Bakewell was in conversation with Guardian journalist Michele Hanson. And we have also had a presence at a number of local events, including Islington Council's Carers Day, the Islington Canal Festival and Islington Age UK's awareness day.

A flourishing organisation

Behind every successful organisation there is a lot of administrative activity. Gwen Ovshinsky, our Secretary, makes sure that we run Islington U3A properly and efficiently, Robert Welsford, our Treasurer, ensures that we have our finances in good shape, and Isabel Dickson as Membership Secretary keeps our membership records in good order and sends out the Newsletter and Bulletin to members.

Thank you all

Islington U3A's success reflects the enthusiasm, commitment and involvement of members. All of us bring our knowledge and experience as we actively participate in Islington U3A activities. And it's wonderful to have around 60 people directly involved in making it all happen through running groups, organising specific events, hosting coffee mornings or being members of the Executive Committee. So a big thank you to all of you. We are truly an organisation that is run by and for its members.