



Chair's report to AGM, 2016

Our third year has again been a successful one. Our membership has grown by 20% and we now have 50 groups. Attendance at Monthly meetings has increased to such an extent that we've had to move to a larger room to accommodate everybody who comes.

Meetings

This increase in numbers reflects the variety and continuing high standard of all the speakers in the monthly meeting programme. This year we've heard about UK politics from journalist Steve Richards, and the role of Satire from actor Steve Nallon, and a range of other experts have talked to us about subjects as diverse as the Origins of Boko Haram, London between Plague and Fire, Why some Children develop severe anti-social behaviour, and the ANC from their foundation to being South Africa's governing party. Monthly meetings coordinator Julie Howell with Gwen Ovshinsky and Margaret Wearing organised this wonderful programme and I'm sure we'd all like to thank them very much for doing so.

Groups

Interest groups are our other mainstay and with 50 flourishing groups run by our committed and talented group coordinators there's so much variety for us to enjoy. So much so, that it's

often difficult to decide which one to choose. A big thank you to all the group coordinators.

New groups that were set up during the year are a short story book group, mahjong, a second painting and drawing group, a group for artists to discuss their work, a second advanced French Conversation group, Discovering Islington and Nearby on Foot, Play Reading and a 5th book group.

There are already several further groups that will start in the New Year, including Walking Football, Outdoor Bowls, Campanology and Bell Ringing and Book Group 6. Walking Football is, I understand, becoming rather fashionable, so if you'd like to try something new, improve your fitness and be up with the latest trend, this is definitely the group for you.

As last year, some groups have again ventured further afield. The French basic conversation group enjoyed a second visit to Southern France. The Advanced French Conversation and the Gardening groups joined up for a trip to Montreuil. They visited lots of lovely gardens and ate several delicious meals but spoke hardly any French.

The Pétanque group entered 3 teams into an international competition called The Londonaise which was held in Barnard Park, and they also took part in the first U3A Petanque weekend tournament on Hayling Island, with one of their teams reaching the final of one competition. They had a great time with a lot of laughter.

Groups' Coordinator, Sue Welsford, again organised the very successful Open Day in October. Over 250 people came to of whom around 70 met us for the first time and we've had a flurry of new members since. Actor and Islington resident, Barbara Flynn cut our birthday cake. The Islington Tribune carried a photo of her cutting the cake with a very positive piece about us and the Islington Gazette also had a brief report.

This year Sue also organised both a coordinators' meeting and a first aid workshop for coordinators. I can attest to the

effectiveness of the latter from being looked after by one of its participants when I broke my wrist.

Sue does a huge amount of work throughout the year to support group coordinators and to get new groups established. And we all benefit so much from the work she does.

While groups are U3A's main way of pursuing our specific interests, there are other formats for sharing our knowledge and developing new skills and this year's structured workshops on creative writing organised by Judith Laurence provided a new approach for us. Members participated in a range of exercises to explore different writing styles and to improve their skills. The feedback was very positive and creative writing is likely to be in our programme again in 2017.

In addition to structured workshops, many U3A's have study days which are organised by members. Islington U3A has the resources to cover the costs of a venue and other expenses for such events. So, if like Judith there is something you would like to organise, the Executive Committee is very receptive to new ideas.

Getting to know each other better

Making new friends is one of the joys of being part of Islington U3A and several of our activities strengthen this aspect of being a member.

Our second pub quiz in January, organised by Lesley Delacourt, was again a great evening. 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, Lesley has arranged for us to do it again on Monday 16 January and tickets are on sale today. So many thanks to Lesley.

The monthly coffee mornings, hosted by members around the borough, continue to be very popular. The aim is to keep them local so that members can get to know others who live nearby. They are very popular so a big thank you to all our kind hosts and to Priscilla Newman who organised them so effectively this

year. Committee member Margaret Wearing has now taken over from her.

An innovation this year is the monthly pub lunches which are also proving a big draw. These take place around Islington and members come together, buy their own lunch and drinks and keep chatting on many subjects for as long as they like. Many thanks to Howard Stone and Roger Wearing for organising them.

In June, over 80 stalwart Islington U3A members demonstrated true grit to enjoy the Summer Party in the Olden Garden in spite of the unseasonably cold evening. The food was again delicious. We drank lots of wine and sparkling elderflower and had a great time. Many thanks to Pauline Frost and her helpers for their efficient organisation

Last week we had our annual theatre visit to see *Deny, Deny, Deny* at the Park Theatre at Finsbury Park. Before the performance Dorcas Morgan, Development Director, chaired a panel with Melli Bond, Creative Director, the play's producer, Denise Sylvie, and playwright, Jonathan Maitland. They spoke about the close relationship that the Park builds with visiting companies. This is particularly valuable for developing excellent new plays. The evening was superbly organised by Sue Welsford, who is also the theatre group coordinator.

Communications

Our three major routes for keeping members informed about what we do continue to be the website, the newsletter and the bulletin.

Derek Harwood took over as website manager in April and has done sterling work in maintaining and improving the site. He is ably supported by Wil Ransome who has been developing his knowledge of the way the website works. It is still one of the most admired U3A websites both for its comprehensive nature and the ease of finding out what you want to know. Keeping it up to date is a huge amount of work and we are very grateful

to both of them for all they do and also to Rosie Walden for ensuring the quality of the copy.

The Newsletter comes out three times a year – in the New Year, around Easter time and the late summer. It is a wonderful record of the very varied and exciting activities of Islington U3A and always makes for fascinating reading. Anna McKane and Rosie Walden have been the editors in the past year. A big thank you to both of them and to all the contributors for such a lively and interesting publication.

The twice-monthly Bulletin provides information about the next monthly meeting, other forthcoming events and new groups in formation. It also tells members about events organised by the U3A national organisation, the Third Age Trust, and by London region of U3As which are open to us. Amongst these are Shared Learning Projects which are collaborative projects between U3As and other organisations. And as many members wish to volunteer for local organisations or as subjects for university research studies we include these opportunities too.

The summer newsletter had reports of two shared learning projects in which Islington U3A members participated, one national project with the Royal Philatelic Society and one in Islington with the Islington Education Library Service. We'd like to include similar reports of members' experiences of volunteering in local charities, or as subjects for academic research studies and of participating in shared learning projects, so please do let us know if you are involved in any of these.

Attracting new members

We continue to have an active programme to attract new members.

More than 100 new members joined during the year, so by the end of September we had 525 members.

The Open Day is our main way of raising our profile locally and recruiting new members. We advertise it in the local press and distribute leaflets across the borough. In addition in September we had a stall at the Angel Canal Festival.

Julia Rountree, Membership Development coordinator, has ensured that information about Islington U3A is available in the libraries across the borough, helped by a team made up of members who live near them. While all these are important we know that word of mouth remains the most effective way of attracting new members.

Julia Rountree has also led a major programme to redress the imbalance in membership between men and women. As I have reported previously, in many U3As only around one fifth of members are men. For us the percentage is around 23%. In May Julia invited all the 100 plus men members to a meeting to discuss how to make Islington U3A more attractive to men. 25 members came and discussed the barriers to men joining and how these could be overcome. Several new groups which may attract men as well as women are in the process of being set up and also the pub lunches resulted from this initiative.

Part of our local community

Each U3A reflects its local area. As Islington has a very varied population where rich and poor live side-by-side, each year we have supported Islington Giving, the local charity that funds projects to reduce poverty and isolation in the borough.

This year there were three separate activities during June to raise money for this very worthwhile charity. We walked the borough boundary, this time along a somewhat different and much more picturesque route. And we had two new events: a Clues Trail around St Paul's and a computer support workshop.

For the clues trail seven teams competed to solve the clues cunningly set by Derek Harwood and we enjoyed finding out much more about an area of the city that we thought we all knew well.

The computer workshop was staffed by a group of iU3A members with advanced computer skills who shared their knowledge and experience, in true iU3A manner, to solve difficulties faced by other members. This proved so successful that a second computer workshop was held in the autumn.

Together with the money raised by the Craft Group selling items they had made at the Open Day, we have raised around £2000 for Islington Giving this year compared with £1600 last year. We are very grateful to Derek Harwood for organising the three events in June.

A flourishing organisation

Every successful organisation needs good administrative systems and our new membership system is a very important development this year. After careful research Membership Secretary, Isabel Dickson recommended that we adopt the Beacon system which has been specially designed by a group of U3As and is sponsored by the Third Age Trust. Implementing the new system has involved a lot of work for Isabel Dickson and Sue Welsford but they both feel it has been worthwhile. In the coming year we will be introducing a number of features of the system which will be helpful to coordinators and members. Thank you so much Isabel for all you do as Membership Coordinator.

And we only operate so smoothly because Gwen Ovshinsky, our Secretary, makes sure that we run Islington U3A properly and efficiently and Robert Welsford, our Treasurer, ensures that we have our finances in good shape.

Being part of a UK wide movement

As you know, iU3A is part of the UK wide network of local U3As which operate autonomously under the auspices of the national organisation, The Third Age Trust. New U3As are being set up all the time and on Tuesday there was a celebration at Friends House to mark the arrival of the 1000th one.

Before iU3a existed, Islington was within North London U3A which even now stretches across a very large geographical area. So plans currently are afoot to create a new U3A to cover Muswell Hill, Crouch End and Highgate. Together with other nearby U3A's, we will be supporting this development.

The future

All our iU3A activities occur because we decide to make them happen. And during this year around a fifth of our members have helped in some way to make it all happen. Many thanks to all of them

But think how much more we could do if the percentage were even greater. As the slogan says, 'every little helps' so if you'd like to be more involved, be it a little or a lot, please do let me know.

As you will have seen in the Bulletin, my term of office ends at the end of September next year. Gwen's term as Secretary also ends then. So for both of us, this is our last year in our current roles. In addition, by the 2017 AGM most of the Executive Committee members will have served for four and a half years and may be thinking of doing other things. In view of this the Executive Committee has set up a Succession Planning Group to ensure there is a smooth transition to a new Executive Committee at next year's AGM. Early in the New Year, they will be letting you know their plans for doing so.

Finally

So finally, I'd like to thank all of you for being such engaged, supportive and appreciative members and making being chair of Islington U3A so enjoyable.