



2020 / 21

This report is presented by the Trustees, the Executive Committee ('EC') members of Islington U3A ('iU3A'). It includes a summary of the accounts in respect of the financial year ended 30 September 2021.

Status

iU3A is an unincorporated association, registered as a charity by the Charity Commission for England and Wales with registration number 1157067. Its correspondence address is 8 College Cross, London N1 1PP and its website address is www.islingtonu3a.org.

Executive Committee

iU3A is managed by its EC. The members of the EC are all appointed by the members of iU3A at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) after a nomination process in accordance with iU3A's Constitution. Candidates for appointment (who need to be members of iU3A) must be nominated by two iU3A members who are not also members of the EC. iU3A members are invited to submit nominations and, if there are more nominations than places available, a ballot is held. No such ballot was required in respect of the appointments made at the AGM in November 2020. In addition, the EC may themselves appoint not more than two co-opted members (who must be members of iU3A) to hold office until the next AGM.

The following served as members of the EC during the 2020/21 financial year:

Officers:

- Chair: Derek Harwood
- Secretary: Sally Fox
- Treasurer: Mary White

Other committee members:

- Judith Altshul
- Chris Bulford
- Margaret Orrell
- Valerie Iles
- Vivek Nanda
- Joy Bailey
- Paula Kahn (co-opted August 2021)

In addition sub-committees or teams were established to help with a number of activities. This strategy allows sharing of the workload and involves more of the membership. The Monthly Meeting sub-committee, the Communications team, and various Event teams have been particularly effective. Also our over 80 Interest Groups have been supported by a Groups Team.

Derek Harwood finishes the allowed three years term as Chair and hence steps down from that position and Judith Altshul steps down from being Groups Coordinator (but both are standing as a Committee Members). Valerie Iles is leaving the EC.

We continue to struggle to get sufficient volunteers to help run an organisation of this size and we'd encourage members to consider helping in any way they can. The tasks are large, small and varied and so any form of help you can offer would be appreciated.

Public Benefit

The public benefit role of iU3A as stated in our Constitution is the advancement of education and self learning, and in giving effect to this role the EC have had regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

Objects

There has been no change to our Constitution in the year and hence our Objects during this year. The Objects are:

"the advancement of education and, in particular, the education of older people and those who are retired from full time work by all means, including associated activities conducive to learning and personal development".

iU3A meets these objects and provides public benefit by enabling members to share their knowledge and experiences and thereby continue to learn, in particular through study and discussion groups ("Groups") and other meetings of members. It also provides opportunities for personal development and social contact at a stage of life when personal horizons and social networks often shrink, leading to social isolation and a deterioration in health and well-being.

The Groups are at its core and reflect the knowledge, skills and expertise of its members. Many Groups are based on equal participation, while others (for example language Groups) are led by members who are experts in the subject.

We have also formed a Memorandum of Understanding with the London Metropolitan University. This allows the two organisations to work together and share resources. We have had some of their lecturers present to us at our Monthly Meetings and we conducted a Shared Learning Project (SLP) with them. The SLP was originally intended to develop an understanding of the use of online methods of learning digital but was broadened to consider how Groups would operate after the pandemic.

Activities, Achievements and Objectives

This year has been another challenging year due to Covid-19. However under the circumstances iU3A has continued to function well and extensively.

We started the year after a drop of membership due to Covid to 679 but have recovered most of that due to our range of activities increasing in the later part of the year, our offer of free membership and our publicity push. We end with a membership level of 692 which returns us to our peak membership figure in 2019 (pre-Covid).

While a number of our Interest Groups' activities were interrupted due to Covid many adopted novel forms to allow their members to stay in touch and support



each other. A few groups did close completely but 75 remained functioning in some form. With the final unwinding of the pandemic restrictions the Groups have sprung back into full vigour and a number of new Groups have been formed taking our overall number again back to over 80. The new form of group using online material as the Subject Adviser has also proved popular and we know have four Politics groups. To cope with demand for Book Groups we have also started a new initiative of 'Slow Reading' where a chapter at a time is reviewed and discussed.

The Executive Committee's annual Strategic Plan stated: "..... the strategy for 2020-21 needs to be a mixture of responding to Covid unwinding and a return to 'normal' activities". The reality was that most of 2020/21 was under the grip of Covid and only in the last few months have we been able to be more constructive in our outlook. Our Covid plan was to endeavour to keep as many Groups functioning as possible, to keep in touch with our membership through increased communications and support the membership as required (through eg the 'Post Code' buddy scheme).

Many of our activities throughout the year continued to be online through Zoom. We continued to offer support to Group Coordinators and members in the use of this technology. Many moved from the basics of being able to join a meeting through Zoom, to being able to cope with Zoom's other functions such as Breakout Rooms, Polls, Close Captionation and Virtual Backgrounds. Now we also have the technical challenge of 'hybrid' meetings – where groups are meeting partly together physically but others joining online. While many members are glad that now we can get out and about more and meet other members face to face again, others are still hesitant and enjoy the easy access that Zoom has provided. It certainly looks like Zoom is here to stay.

Another core part of the iU3A's activities continues to be our 'monthly' meetings and our high quality of speakers. Part of our 'Covid Plan' had been to increase the frequency of these to two talks per month and this has continued through 2020/21 and attendance figures have been reasonably high even though these have been provided on Zoom only. The topics covered have been as diverse as:

The Refugee Crisis: Beyond the Headlines; The first people's princess; Rediscovering James Mason; Egyptology; Tales from the Trees; The Life and Times of Douglas Adams; Captain Cook's First Voyage; BAME/Black Lives Matter; The New Psychedelic Revolution; Marylebone tour; County Lines & St Giles Trust; The 2nd Voyage of HMS Beagle; Algeria treasures; The Old Operations Theatre Museum & Herb Garret; There are fewer than you think: why expert women are under-represented on the news; The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: a Twentieth Century History; The Soanes at John Soane Home: Pitzhanger Manor; Jane Austen's World; Wild life in Islington; "Two bars of chocolate a day can slash the risk of heart attack and stroke".....really?; Life of Keats (1795 – 1821 – 2021) Only-ness and Belonging; The Century of Deception: The Birth of the Hoax in Eighteenth-Century England.



A further lively calendar of talks is planned for 2022. We are grateful to our Monthly Meeting sub-committee for being able to sustain such a full and varied programme and of course we are grateful to all our speakers for giving freely of their time, knowledge and expertise.

Our Communications team have also been active in the year. As we move into our ninth year of operation a number of our 'systems' or 'methods' have started to become out moded. Our Newsletters have been re-vamped and taken on a fresher, brighter look with vibrant content. The Bulletin format has similarly been reviewed and we hope to move to a new software package soon to allow us to provide a better platform for this key regular communication method. Similarly the Dreamweaver software that our Website was built on is now outdated. The Communications Team (and its Website Re-Design sub team) have been developing a 'Specification' to describe what form of new look website we want. Utilising this we hope to move to a new website in 2021/22. The Communications Team also have increased our publicity efforts, increasing our use of leaflets in libraries to now include stalls at strategic points across the borough and new look brighter leaflets.

We have re-started a Facebook account. Members either love Facebook or won't touch it with a barge pole. However it is a useful publicity media and has already brought in new members. As we attract a younger membership, social media will play a bigger part in our communications.

We can look forward to a more normal year in 2021/22 as Covid-19 impacts continue to recede but what will our 'new normal' look like? We need to be agile to acknowledge and adopt to the changes the pandemic has created with, for example, ongoing online learning opportunities. The EC feels we are well placed to respond to these changing challenging times and continue to offer a range of attractive activities and opportunities to our membership.

Finances and Treasurer's Report

With the ongoing uncertainties due to Covid restrictions we made the decision to reduce the annual fee for one year to £15. We were confident that this would be sufficient to cover our costs as we also had a healthy balance to draw on if necessary. However, we were also concerned that we might suffer a significant loss in membership as the fees support all our activities. Our subscription fees income this year amounted to £9,891. Our final balance (reserves) this year amounted to £30,187 - an increase of £3,236 on last year's balance. As our main expenditure is usually meeting rooms this explains the increase due to rooms not being hired.

Considering the fact that some members were reluctant to leave home even when things 'opened up' or did not choose to take advantage of virtual activities, we are thankful that the majority of members have stuck with us.

Unlike some u3as who completely shut down, we have invested funds in technical equipment to support zoom and hybrid activities, and provided occasional fun events with outside entertainers.

In order to raise our profile in the community much work has been done recently on publicity and we have invested in flyers and public events (Open Day and stalls in eg Chapel Market) to get the message across that we exist and also to a diverse audience. This is proving to be beneficial resulting in a steady stream of new members and revenue. In addition we have spent on advertising through our new Facebook account.

Our decision to revert back to the £30 fee for next year was influenced by the inevitable rise in hiring fees, but we are also conscious that some members may not wish to host activities in their own homes at this time so rather than cancelling we are able to offer money to hire neutral space. Money has been spent on equipment in order to offer hybrid meetings in private homes and can be increased if there is the demand. We hope we are ready for a welcome return to our normal activities with more new members and new groups. Members and Groups should remember that we have the funding to support them.

Conclusion

iU3A is a voluntary organisation that is run totally by and for its members,, we have no paid staff. 'It All Depends on Us' continues to be our relevant strapline. The EC is grateful to all members who contribute so much of their time, energies and expertise in organising and maintaining iU3A's activities. Without them iU3A would not be the vibrant, active and successful organisation that it is today. We hope that, even with the impacts of Covid-19, you have enjoyed your year with iU3A and will continue with us and enjoy all the activities we provide.

This report was approved by the Executive Committee on 22 October 2021.

Derek Harwood
Chair

Mary White
Treasurer