

## **NLU3A CHAIR'S REPORT TO 2024 AGM**

This was the thirtieth year for NLU3A, a wonderful achievement involving so much social and learning activity for so many people over such a long time. I hope you have all enjoyed the year. We marked the anniversary with a celebratory tea in Muswell Hill Methodist Church and it was really great to have one of our founder members with us, Keith Richards, who shared with us his reminiscences of NLU3A's setting up.

Our membership has continued to grow. This August we had 582 members, which was 12% up on the same time last year. This was partly due to a lot of hard work on publicity led by Michael Lewin and to events like the East Finchley festival and our open morning, led by Marion Fitzpatrick, in both cases assisted by many other members. Many thanks to them for all the hard work involved. But a lot of our new members come from word of mouth – never forget you are our most important recruiters, by what you tell your friends and families about what you are enjoying with us.

I'm sorry I haven't managed to attend the monthly meetings; they have really flourished under Edmond Cohen's leadership. Attendance has been tremendous with talks ranging from Edward the Confessor to alien life. On occasion, numbers have got so high that we neared the capacity of St Margaret's. We now have a team working with Edmond to choose topics and manage speakers and we are very grateful to Edward Halsted for standing in to run September's meeting in Edmond's absence.

Henrietta and her team continue the massive task of nurturing and supporting getting on for 70 interest groups. We have experimented with new topics and activities – some have lasted only a short time, while others are still going. It's important to remember that without taking the risk of trying something new, we would never grow and develop and not all groups need to be there for all time. Do let us know if you'd like to try something out. Experienced members can help new members to get a group going. And thanks to everyone who does lead activities – it's often hard work but it's really appreciated.

Then there are the one-off events, like the Further Away Days organised by Mel Rees, the Summer Programme organised by Michael Lewin and the festive lunch in December, organised by Marion with the help of Elsa

Ramsey and her catering team. These were great opportunities to meet new people and I am glad so many members took advantage of them.

Last year, I had to warn that we needed to take action to reduce our financial deficit. You will have seen from Roy Seger's Treasurer's report that we think we are on course to break even in 2024, as a result of a combination of growing membership and cost-cutting measures, particularly on venue hire. It hasn't all been easy, especially when it has meant people having to give up venues they have been using for a long time, and the committee are grateful to everyone affected for your forbearance. I am so pleased that it appears to have worked and we have been able to keep subscriptions unchanged this year and not out of line with other U3As in the area.

Roy will be giving up the treasurership this year, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his work behind the scenes to keep our accounts in order and ensure we stay solvent. I am delighted to welcome Stewart Maugham as his successor as Treasurer – today he has doubled up as both an expert speaker on the music of Gershwin and a financial expert as our new Treasurer. U3As are all about exercising diverse skills.

I would also like to welcome Harjit Hart as a new committee member. She will be focussing on providing a good welcome to new members, making sure we look at proposals from their point of view as well as from that of long-established members and finding people to fill the various roles in the organisation. In addition, as a former lawyer, she has already provided invaluable advice to the committee on our policies.

Meanwhile, Ruth Silver continues to provide huge support, which when I joined the committee was done by three people – looking after membership, taking minutes of meetings and providing advice on compliance and business issues. I should remind you that next year a number of committee members, myself included, will have to leave their present posts or leave the committee altogether. Our U3A cannot function without office holders so we always need people coming forward for these duties. We don't want to find we are looking at winding up or merger just because we don't have enough. So if we ask if you can help, please do give it a thought. We always have a team approach, so there's plenty of support and no one job is too onerous.

And talking of onerous jobs, I want to say a special word of thanks to our Website Editor, Susan Watt, who sometimes says she wants the results of her work to be invisible to members, but I'm not going to let her get away with that. Our website is the key way we communicate with members and non-members alike about what we are about. We have been migrating our website to a new architecture which will be easier to maintain and support and this has meant we needed to look at every page and refresh it and make sure it is easy to use as well as being easy on the eye. That has meant an enormous amount of painstaking work led by Susan, and our longstanding technical manager, Mike Christie.

Do use our website to find the answer to any questions you have; use it to find out about different groups; use it to find out our policies on issues like health and safety and do have a look at our new Frequently Asked Questions page. It has always been a good website, in my view. I hope you will agree that it is even better now. But if you have any comments - good or bad – please do let me or Susan know.

That's it for this year. I hope you've all got friendship and enjoyment out of it. Onwards to the next thirty years...

Michael Johns

August 2024