

NLU3A CHAIR'S REPORT TO 2025 AGM

2024/25 has been another successful year for NLU3A. Our numbers continue to edge upwards and membership is now above 600. A warm welcome to all of you who have joined in the last year.

Monthly meetings are now full to bursting every time, thanks to a fascinating selection of speakers chosen by the team of Edmond Cohen, Susan Watt and Edward Halstead. Topics in the last year have ranged from the Supreme Court to garden plants and from George Gershwin to the London Air Ambulance Service. And I know they have a full and equally varied programme already booked for the months ahead. Thanks also to the refreshment team who keep the conversation before the talks lubricated and to everyone at St Margaret's Church who give us so much help and for whom nothing is ever too much trouble.

Our 60-odd Interest Groups continue to thrive, thanks to all the Group Coordinators, led by Henrietta Cohen and her energetic team of Candiss Waldram and Mary O'Toole. I'm very pleased that we continue to refresh our offer – new groups this year include a second yoga group, a theatre visits group and a philosophy group. Do let us know if you have ideas for a new group; it's particularly easy if several of you are interested in the same topic and are able to run it as a team. And also let us know if groups are full and you want a duplicate set up: we have added further Bridge and Scrabble groups this year.

We've had some great trips out of London, including a river cruise on the River Lea, a trip to Canterbury and a visit to Ingatestone Hall organised by the indomitable Mel Rees and Judy Griggs. Again, we'd like to do more, including reviving Away Days within London; however, to do this we need a few members to help organise them.

I know many of you are interested in having social get-togethers on an ad hoc basis. Any chance of getting a team together to do more? Thanks to Marion Fitzpatrick we have organised a successful summer tea and winter festive lunch, as well as thank-you teas for Group Coordinators and welcome meetings for new members (helped by Elsa Ramsay, Aliya Middleton and the ever-hospitable Edmond and Henrietta Cohen). For the first time, our festive lunch was in a local restaurant. As well as keeping the preparatory work down, the event was a great success and we plan to repeat it in a new location.

And I'm especially grateful to Mike Lewin, assisted by Sally Atkinson and many others, who put together an amazing six weeks of one-off events – walks, visits, a quiz, social gatherings and more – for our Summer Programme. Mike also leads our publicity efforts with Marion at events like the East Finchley Festival in June and the Open Morning in September. On top of all this, I'm really delighted that Mike has now agreed to take on the role of Vice Chair. He's shown a real gift for getting things going and carrying people with him.

Sometimes people say to me they're not sure where to find out about what we offer. The first place to look is on our website. The new site, which Susan Watt and Mike Christie set up last year, is running smoothly and is easy to find your way around. Once a month I send out a newsletter by email which draws attention to new offers

or developments, and Henrietta Cohen supplements this by sending out emails about particular events. And if you prefer the more discursive approach, our termly magazine, *The Northern Line*, edited by Leni Green has articles about all sorts of things, often including Interest Group activities.

Supporting all this is a steady flow of administrative work. I'd like to pay especial thanks to Ruth Silver, who is leaving the committee this year, though not giving up her administrative work. For the last few years she has been combining the role of Membership Secretary, dealing with subscriptions and enquiries about membership, with the role of Business Secretary, taking minutes of meetings and watching that we comply with all the regulations which govern organisations like ours. This really is going above and beyond – and even now, although she is leaving the committee, she will be continuing to manage the membership role unless another member steps forward. George II famously said, when an adviser complained that General Wolfe was mad, "Mad is he? Then I hope he will bite some of my other generals and make them mad too." I think Ruth must be mad to do all she does for us, but I may send her round to bite other members.

All this takes time and money to make it happen. We have a superb body of members who put in that little bit extra time, but they continually move on and so we're always looking for replacements. Which is why I make no excuse for repeating the plea to you all to think about whether there is anything you can contribute, whether helping with the catering or preparing events, joining teams to organise trips, or providing administrative help. The more people come forward, the less any one of us has to do a mad amount.

Looking at our finances, we have taken steps in the last few years to cut the costs of hiring venues and also to reduce postage and printing costs. I am pleased to say we have successfully trialled taking payments by card through our website and by card readers at events. This saves on postage and also cuts down a lot of paperwork associated with cheques. If you can pay this way in future, please do. While we are still working on card payments for all events, it will be the main method to use when we come to the next subscription renewal season.

The steps we have taken mean that we are no longer running a financial deficit. I am delighted that, as Stewart Maugham has explained in his Treasurer's Report, we want to see if we can operate next year with a 10% reduction in subscriptions. At a time of continuing inflation in other costs, I hope this will be a small relief for members. We are proposing that the standard membership cost will go down from £40 to £36. Some members will still qualify for lower subscriptions than this, because they belong to another u3a as well, or because they join part way through the year, or because they have financial difficulties. These special rates can be found on our website: look at the "Join" page.

Finally, a word about myself. I have now been Chair for three years, which is as long as the current constitution allows. It's been fun, mixing with you all and getting involved in all the different things we do, but health issues and other commitments make it impossible for me to continue. So, subject to the agreement of members at this AGM, I will be stepping down as Chair at the end of this meeting and resuming

my previous role as Business Secretary. Edmond Cohen has very kindly agreed to step back into the role of Chair, which he held very ably before me, and he will stand in unless or until we can find someone else who will take the post longer term. We need a small amendment to the constitution to allow him to do this; you will find it on the AGM agenda. I do hope you will all consider whether you or someone you know could take on the role of Chair on a more long-term basis. It's not actually too onerous as the committee virtually runs itself, but we do need a member to step forward and take a lead, or a pair of members could share the role.

Thank you all, particularly my fellow committee members, for making my time so easy and enjoyable. I hope you all continue to have a rewarding time at NLU3A.

Michael Johns

August 2025