

Chair's Hello

A warm greeting to all members. I hope your spirits are rising as the days get longer, the weather improves and the tulips, seedlings, bluebells and blossom all herald what we hope is a brighter year ahead. Most importantly many of us are now vaccinated and there is optimism that we may be emerging at last from the Covid crisis. We must, of course, continue to be careful and follow guidelines but after June 21st we might cautiously begin to resume something like normal life.

Our Swindon u3a is also looking forward to slowly restarting our activities as the year progresses. I know many of you are longing to return to your groups, to meeting your friends and exploring your shared interests together. What welcome news it is then that 20 of our groups have restarted – all are outdoor sports and walking groups who can more easily achieve the ventilation and social distancing requirements – but it is a welcome start.

Further good news is that we welcome two new members to our Management Committee: Jim Sinclair who is our new Groups Co-ordinator and Bryan Neaves who is our new Health and Safety Officer. Both will be playing key roles in advising and supporting our groups as they restart over the coming months.

We continue to address our financial concerns. There are so many unknowns and variables at present that it is difficult to make hard and fast decisions, but we are working on several possible options depending on how these variables evolve: How many members renew? What will venues be charging? Will the Government Roadmap remain? Can we attract more new members? Answers to these 'what ifs' will emerge over the coming months and we have, therefore decided to hold fire on major decisions until September 1st when we have more information. The potential financial deficit won't go away, however, and we will need to introduce measures to reduce costs in the new academic year. One measure we will be introducing is to ask members who wish to continue to receive a copy of the Third Age Matters magazine, (TAM), to pay for this as a separate item. Currently, it is paid for by us to the Third Age Trust out of your subscription.

You may remember that we asked members who have not supplied an email address to do so to cut our paper and postage costs and quite a few did so. Thank you. However, we still have 203 members who have not supplied an email address. If you know of anyone in your group who is concerned about their ability to use email perhaps you could help? We also offer help and support. Not only would using email help with our costs but it also opens up for them a rich seam of on-line activities and communications during these rather isolating times. Reducing our paper costs also helps us to achieve one of the objectives in our new Climate Change Policy which we are currently developing.

The date when subscriptions can be paid has also been delayed until July 1st 2021 and we do look forward to you re-joining us. The more the merrier! On June 2nd there is to be a national u3a Open Day to promote our wonderful organisation and attract new members. Swindon u3a will have a stand in the Brunel Centre. Do come and visit us there, say hello and pick up a leaflet for yourself and another for a friend.

We also continue to keep in touch with our monthly on-line events. The March 'Gilbert and Sullivan' talk, organised by our Events Team, was much enjoyed and we are following that, on May 10th with 'Mad Musicians and Crazy Dancers' which will be looking back at some of the bizarre singing and dancing entertainments of all time! And, to follow that, in June, why not get your kicks on Route 66 with 'California Dreaming' a road trip from San Francisco to the Grand Canyon with some fascinating facts about the Golden Gate Bridge, the 1906 earthquake and much more.... Keep an eye on the Swindon u3a website for details and booking information. On the website you will also find lots of other interesting information to help you keep in touch.

I hope that when I next write to you in June there will be more good news to report about our gradual return to normality, the restarting of our groups and our ability to meet each other again to learn, laugh and live.

Gill Brain

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