

Report to AGM 2021 from the Chair



It is again a pleasure to present an annual report to U3A Dunedin.

A particular welcome to all our new members – we all hope that you find mental stimulation through your association with us and that friendships will deepen – both ingredients for good health as we age.

A moment of remembrance before we proceed further to consider those friends who were with us at this time last year. We can remember with gratitude and affection all those friendships meant to us and in particular we remember Board member Jude Hathaway whose lively presence always brought pleasure and smiles and Patricia Thwaites who served so well on the Programme Committee.

Today we have 892 members with 55 receiving material by post. This is a slight reduction from 930 and 66 respectively at last AGM.

At AGM 2020 we knew about the COVID-19 virus that seems to have appeared from China but I doubt that hardly any of us envisaged the profound effect that it would have on our lives. We realise that our members are experienced, well-educated and motivated and that these attributes set us in good stead for coping with adversity. The “post Covid” surveys done in New Zealand by the University of Auckland show that the over-60 age group fared best during the year. For the most part, we were not worried about losing our jobs, had the security of a pension and have mortgages either paid off or well under control. That fortunate state allowed us to think of other people and do what we could.

For U3A we had Series 1 well underway, Series 2 planned and over a dozen discussion groups in full swing. About three weeks into Series 1 we decided to cancel further activities and shortly after that the country went into Alert Level 4 for six weeks. John Holmes gave valuable and experienced advice at that time. The Board was able to continue planning via e-mail and later took up a Zoom licence and carried out Board meetings in that medium. We felt it important that U3A Dunedin continued to serve the membership and the Magazine was born with articles on a wide range of subjects. The photo gallery enabled us to share what we saw in our neighbourhoods in similar vein to the ODT.

At the same time, our excellent Web Master John Shanks rejigged our web site so that it could be accessed more comfortably from cell phones or tablets.

As the Alert Levels moved down, we opted to deliver Series 2 by Zoom and hearty thanks are offered to Stuart Strachan, Linda Kinniburgh, Doug Holborow and Barrie Peake in particular as they surveyed the membership to see if such an experiment was viable. Series 2 was delivered free of charge and no bookings were necessary. Twelve one-hour sessions were delivered and our feedback showed that it was a good choice and appreciated, even though we know that our members certainly prefer the face-to-face delivery method when possible.

Zoom meetings can be conducted on cell phones and their increasing role in our lives was underscored as we moved to safer Alert Levels and had to use Track and Trace with the Covid app on the phones. There are several organisations in the city (eg Dunedin Public Library) which provide free IT training and members are all encouraged to make as much use of those services as possible to stay involved in our rapidly changing world.

We planned to operate Series 3 under Alert Level 2 restrictions (limited numbers, spaced seating, hand sanitising, optional masks and stay home if unwell etc) but were mightily relieved when the Alert Level fell to 1 before we started. We used Track and Trace, sanitiser and careful practices to allow that Series to run almost as normal.

We now have plans for Series 1 and 2 in 2021 and know how we will need to respond if our borders do leak and we have to revert to Alert Level 2. If an outbreak takes us to Level 3 or 4 we shall suspend operations which require personal contact and reconsider Zoom.

Meetings of Discussion Groups were left to the decision of those involved. Some groups, especially the walking group, continued but most adopted a “wait and see” strategy.

During this time we developed the U3A Dunedin Personal Account Facility which members access with their User Name and Number (on the Name Badge/Lanyard) and this enabled us to give credits to members who had paid for the complete Series 1. This system also allows for credits to be given to members who have to withdraw from courses (see the reimbursement policy). Our annual subscription of \$30 is reduced for those who were paid up members in 2020.

We are now able to delay payment of course enrolment fees until after any ballot – members will be advised of the need to pay by post or e-mail closer to the start of a Series. For this service we owe a huge debt of gratitude to our Treasurer, Evan Taylor, and our brilliant Web Master, John Shanks. The fact that John also managed to transfer his University courses to Zoom delivery and arrange for exams to be done at a distance during Alert Levels 3 and 4 underscores how much we owe to his technical expertise.

We usually donate to departments and organisations after our courses but after Series 1 we donated to the University Student Hardship Fund, and many members who were offered a rebate for the incomplete Series 1 donated that to the fund. The University was most appreciative.

Members are aware that many banks have stopped using cheques and so U3A Dunedin will have to phase them out in time also. On-line banking is proving an easy option for many and banks will help their customers deal with banking by telephone.

It is a digital era and the need to keep up is stressed (whilst I can personally attest that keeping abreast of changes is a cause of considerable stress.) We are surprised to see that one post-Covid change has been a refusal by some businesses to accept cash. Contactless exchanges do help at these times, but it is another adaptation we are called on to make.

To get the very best from U3A Membership, apart from participating in as many lectures and Discussion Groups as possible, I encourage members to make full use of the website. It has grown enormously this year with added facilities for members and publication of notices of face-to-face lectures as well as Zoom events.

We have added a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) to the site – accessible from the home page without a member login. The most frequent question is “Is there a waiting list?” and the answer is “No”.

We have completed the gifting of the \$50,000 to the University of Otago for the scholarship and also the \$20,000 to four community organisations – as planned and signalled at the last AGM. We have been able to make donations to some university departments (outlined in the regular Letter from the Chair) although, for obvious reasons, not as much as in normal years.

U3A is not just about us – we do have a wider dimension and I refer to the Climate Emergency declared by Government in November 2020. Our U3A Dunedin response is to encourage reduction of our carbon footprint by encouraging the use of Ride Share to attend meetings, the Board's use of Zoom for many of its meetings, the purchase of \$400 carbon offsets and the decision to pay for offsets for any of our presenters who travel by air. Our children and grandchildren look to us for a response to the climate emergency and we must not let them down.

We wear U3A Dunedin-supplied name badges to meetings and we have distributed hundreds of the new lanyards at no cost to members. Replacement lanyards have been supplied free in the past but a \$5 fee is in place for 2021 and that will encourage more careful resource use.

I am grateful for the huge personal support given over my three years in the Chair by Board Secretary Marion Potter. She has acted as my PA as well as my unofficial Vice-Chair for two and a half of those years. She arranges the AGM and writes many letters on our behalf as well as fielding a lot of phone calls. We planned a celebration for our Life Members Judith Gray, Sue Cathro, Bill George, Douglas Holborow, John Shanks and it had to be postponed several times because of the Alert Levels but it did take place together with a celebration cake and special badges which she arranged. She has huge institutional memory for which we can all be very thankful.

Beavering away in the background are our other two secretaries: Lynda Jackson (Membership) and Phyll Esplin (Course Enrolments). Their jobs continue to evolve as our organisation moves more and more to the web. Annette Riley has helped to ensure that appropriate letters of thanks are sent to the presenters and I know from feedback that those letters are much appreciated and used when University staff apply for promotions. Tree Cocks looks after the minutes of the Programme Committee and Lloyd Smith collates the suggestions from members for new courses and so helps plan the coming programmes to ensure we have a good balance.

I also add my thanks to all the members of the Board particularly Treasurer Evan Taylor whose careful stewardship of the finances enables us to do as much as we do and be generous. Sandra Goodchild helps out with financial reviews. Rob Lawson is looking after our "Green" credentials and Gretchen Kivell has assiduously taken the minutes of the meetings. Zoom provided new challenges there.

The Programme Committee is the engine room of any U3A and Linda Kinniburgh (now Vice-Chair) and Stuart Strachan have led a magnificent team who have helped us to do more than just survive. Douglas Holborow and Barrie Peake have remained at the forefront of all activities there, well supported by Dorothy Kerin.

We tested our emergency evacuation procedures at two large courses at which Douglas Holborow was convenor and cleared the Golf Club in 2min 17 sec and the Bowling Club in 1min 47 sec. These times are within the safety margin set by the Fire Service.

Ngairé Bates and her team have kept Discussion Groups active and they will go from strength to strength this year.

Clare Robertson produces the course brochures that we read and she is meticulous in ensuring that dates, venues, costs and so on are all recorded accurately. Whenever there is a change in the order of presenters, she arranges a new version of the brochure for the web. She needs to liaise with all the presenters and course organisers to get this job completed – no mean task.

Geoff Adams continues to produce an excellent FORUM and we can all see where the ODT gained its use of puns. Meanwhile over at Discussion Groups Jill Geary and Bill Stanford have produced their lively monthly Newsletters – plenty of news about very active groups, photographs, colour – the lot.

Gerard Kenny is in charge of mailing to those who still opt to receive documents that way. He arranges printing, folding, collating and posting several times each year.

Others not highlighted but important in many ways are: Jane Johnson, Jeanette Leigh, Eldora Gilbert, Patricia Thwaites and our University Representatives Elaine Webster and James Rodgers, Kevin O’Sullivan, Lester Flockton and Anneloes de Groot all made a contribution but retired from active service during the year.

We are well served by the team at Impressions Audio Visual, headed these days by Cy Newton and of course the excellent folk who look after us at the Golf Club (Jane Kubala), the Bowling Club (Doug Fallow and Lou Robinson) and here at Salmond (Barbara Wilkes).

It is a privilege to be part of such a team as this.

I am pleased to move this report for adoption.

Alan Jackson
Chair 2018-2021