

Executive Committee Report 2023/2024

This year has been quite unusual in that for the first time in our history we have not had a Chair. We do not therefore have a Chair's report but an Executive Committee Report.

Having found ourselves in this position after last year's AGM the first task of the new Executive Committee was to establish the legalities of continuing as a u3a branch and the procedures for running the Executive Committee without a Chair.

A review of our Constitution confirmed that it was legal to continue, providing that specific procedures were followed. The main issue was that, prior to any Committee business taking place, a Chair was appointed.

The Committee followed the procedures and thankfully have worked very much as a team for the good of the membership. It is clear from the many positive comments received from the members that the work of the Committee has been very much appreciated in this challenging but very successful year.

The year got into full swing with a highly successful Open Day in September organised by our two Group Coordinators Trevor Millar and Alan Telford and supported by our Group Leaders. A large turnout resulted in many new members and new and existing members joining the various Groups. In addition to the many very successful Groups we now have an Art Group, Inspiring Travel and a Discussion Group, all three being very well supported. A big thank you to all our Group Leaders who are the backbone of the u3a.

The Questa Group had an enjoyable range of events during the year including two visits to Killyleagh Castle, a visit to the Seamus Heaney Centre, and Spanish and Anzac wine tasting evenings. Our Christmas lunch was very well attended and enjoyed by all.

Our Webmaster Hill Wilson not only kept us informed of all that is happening across the Comber & District Branch with his continuous updating of the website but has upgraded the website very successfully. While the new website maintains a lot of features familiar to members it has improved the capacity to insert images including a slide show for images. Comber & District u3a is the first Branch in Northern Ireland to new the new website system, another example of our Branch modernising, thanks to the hard work of Hill.

Our new Membership Secretary David Wilson has had a busy year in promoting the Comber & District Branch, registering new members, collecting payments, maintaining the membership database, and providing information to the National u3a. In August we introduced Beacon, a secure, efficient, effective and accurate means of managing day to day functions of membership, groups and finance. It reduces significantly work involved in the sending of emails by the membership secretary and group leaders and most importantly ensure that we are compliant with data protection regulations.

Our new Speaker Secretary Margaret McMillan has ensured that we have been entertained at our monthly meetings with a broad range of speakers. Nigel Carr shared aspects of his highly successful rugby career. Keith Burnside reminisced about his time at UTV, GMTV, BBC and Downtown. WE were fortunate to have Matthew Warwick again to toast the haggis. Deborah Girvin took us on a journey of the Columban Way and Paul Stuart, site manager at Castle Espie outlined the ecological importance of Strangford Lough. We are grateful too to those who looked after the catering arrangements each month and to our “ Meeters and Greeters “ Heather, Marianne and Maggi. Thanks also to Anna McDowell our Secretary for her work particularly in respect of the Executive Committee.

Our Treasurer Terry Needham maintains records on our income and expenditure, keeps the Executive Committee fully informed of the financial position and provides advice and guidance on all financial matters. With Terry’s excellent stewardship and the increase in our membership from 288 last year to the present 317 our finances are in a very healthy position which means that we can keep the fees at £15 during this period of high inflation. We are very grateful to Terry, who has decided to stand down from the Committee, for his work over the years.

We would also like to thank Bob Campbell and Joan Cowan who have served on the Executive Committee but who now have decided to stand down. Joan undertook several roles and we are particularly grateful for her time as our Branch Chair.

In conclusion we would like to encourage the membership to consider taking up a role as a Group Leader, Committee Member or as one of the Officers.

Executive Committee