

UPPER BANN U3A AGM - CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Today I am very happy to present my first Chairman's report. I am happy, not because it is my first report nor indeed because it is my last report as Chairperson but because it is my belief that Upper Bann U3A is a very successful, growing organisation which provides a valuable service to the community. Frequently I reflect on my parents' generation and think how much they missed by not having U3A in their lives.

During the year under review we have been enlightened and enlivened by a wide range of speakers and entertainers. We have been on an Icelandic and North Sea expedition cruise with Pat Flowerday, We have learned about Natural History, the Linen Industry in the Upper Bann area, and John Knox, Ireland's forgotten hero.

Helen Moorehead, a remarkable lady delivered a very passionate talk on her work and experiences in Kenya where she worked with children who suffered severe hearing impairment. Her story was incredible. We were alerted by the PSNI to measures and devices to help prevent crime and of course, we were entertained once again, by the very talented Jim Smart.

One thing that the committee particularly wanted to ensure was that coming to monthly meetings was a friendly and sociable event. To that end the Committee has done a wonderful job with Alix meeting and greeting at the door, Norma and Ruth providing much appreciated refreshments whilst in true U3A fashion, other members helped along the way. We owe them our sincere thanks.

The Committee meets once per month to forward plan and to ensure everything is proceeding smoothly, **Geraldine McIvor**, our very efficient secretary, has the unenviable task of minuting our diverse discussions, a job she has been doing for the past two year. Geraldine receives communications from outside agencies, deciphers them and passes them on to the relevant committee member. She keeps us all right on policies and procedures, she organises venues, times and dates of meeting. She liaises

with The Third Age Trust She, like the other committee members is always willing to give a helping hand. As chairperson I heavily relied on her to keep me right. So if I am not conducting today's meeting in line with protocol, the one to blame is Geraldine.

Maureen Carroll has been an enthusiastic and hard working committee member for several years. She relinquished the role as treasurer earlier in the year and sadly she feels that the time has come for her to stand down . I would like to put on record our gratitude for her contribution to many areas. Maureen is a lady of many talents but one of her particular talents is in the preparation and presentation of food. Maureen has been a key member of the BBQ team and we hope Maureen, we will benefit from your help again this year.

You are hearing it here today. The BBQ this year will be in Kilbroney Park in Rostrevor on Tuesday 24th May. You will received further details soon. Unfortunately the weather last year was not in our favour but we enjoyed ourselves in Castlewellan Park as we sheltered under Gary's Gazebos. Those who took part in Tom's Treasure Hunt returned like drowned rats but they returned to a spread fit for a king. The meats, the salads, the breads, the desserts, the cakes were absolutely delicious and I would like to give a collective 'thank you' to all involved.

At this point I would like to mention Graham. Graham was elected to the committee last April. When Maureen relinquished her role as Treasurer in June, Graham agreed to take on the role. Handling and recording group finances is not an easy task but thank you Graham for taking over as treasurer.

Membership has increased significantly year on year since the Upper Bann branch was formed in 2009. Laura will update us on the detail of growth during the current year. Communicating with existing and new members in relation to subscriptions and gift tax, liaising with Third Age Trust other membership matters is quite a time consuming task. We tend not to give much thought to the extent of the roles of committee members but I want to

express our sincere thanks to Laura, our membership secretary and Ruth our assistant membership secretary for the efficient manner in which they undertake the task.

This year we embarked on an advertising campaign. With the help of David Armstrong assisted by Alix, we got articles into the local paper, we approached churches in the Upper Bann area and asked permission to put a short article in the church bulletins, many complied. Geraldine prepared very attractive promotional material in the form of a postcard, dispelling U3A myths and members distributed these locally.

The webpage continues to be an important marketing tool. Every effort is made to keep our webpage up-to-date in terms of notification of future activities and we keep a record of past events, not only for those interested in joining Upper Bann U3A but also for existing members. One area I would like to see develop in the coming year is the comments section. In the early days members did comment on their experiences, but eventually the comments came in the form of spam mail only. John Trimble was able to filter these and now the spam has been eliminated, we receive no comments at all.

The Newsletter which is added to the webpage is prepared towards the end of each month - August through to May. It would be much appreciated if members forwarded photographs and articles of events or articles of interest for inclusion in the newsletter.

The Activity groups are the heart of what we do at U3A. At the start of the year we thought it would be useful to prepare a Convenor's handbook. As the membership grew and suggestions were coming in on possible additional activities it was deemed to be a good idea to appoint a Group Co-ordinator.

Starting new groups, looking for convenors on the one hand and participants on the other, identifying venues, agreeing days and dates, reporting on progress, providing encouragement and resolving problems is no mean task. Despite the fact that he is a convenor of a cycling group, willingly fills in on occasions as Walk leader, tutors the sizeable Bridge group, Tom Young

agreed to take over this role. Mind you he is blessed by having a very understanding and supportive wife. Nonetheless Tom we owe you a debt of gratitude.

The main channel of communication in Upper Bann U3A is by email and the Newsletter. More than 90% of our membership have digital devices but many have limited skills in using them. The members were surveyed earlier in the year and 70 + expressed an interest in training. These members were grouped according to the type of device, windows, android or IOS. John Trimble kindly agreed to take responsibility for windows and android users and organised training sessions in Portadown Library. The first IOS sessions for Apple users were held in Bleary Business and Community Centre and were aimed at total beginners. A second session covering a range of topics was advertised and fifty members expressed an interest in taking part. Two iPad training sessions took place on the 14th April and two more are planned for 28th. The iPad training has been led by Leanne Chapman from 02. A mentor was allocated to each pair and as Leanne demonstrated a point, the mentors helped the participants to follow instructions. The feedback received on the training to date has been very positive and once again a big thank you to all involved.

Beacon I remember when Brenda Robinson was Membership Secretary/ Treasurer she frequently spoke of the demands of the role but felt it could not be divided into two roles. When Brenda resigned, a membership secretary was appointed and a treasurer was appointed. Very quickly we realised the administrative problems referred to by Brenda. I googled other U3As to see if I could establish how they coped, only to discover they didn't. The problems we identified were problems right across the board. I became aware that work was being done on a computer programme to help alleviate these and other identified problems. The programme under development was called 'The Beacon Project'. It seemed an interesting area to become involved in but it required someone with IT skills at a high level. John Trimble's name was put forward as an IT guru. He was approached and co-opted on to the Committee during the year. John made contact with the Beacon Project Team, expressed an interest in the working of the programme. He has put a

lot of time and effort into getting our system into a state of readiness for inclusion as a pilot branch. The system is free of charge. It is an integrated system, connecting the various facets of our organisation. Those Committee members who worked on it with John are impressed by its capabilities. I am happy to report that Upper Bann U3A is the first branch in N. Ireland to be involved in the pilot scheme.

Thank you John for all your hard work and we look forward to learning more about the Beacon project in the weeks to come.

That concludes my first and last report to you. It has been an honour and a privilege to act as Chairperson and I could not have asked for a more enthusiastic and willing committee to serve with. Thank you also to all the members who have been so supportive.