

## CHAIRS REVIEW - April 2024 to March 2025

I find it difficult to believe I picked up the reins as Chairman twelve months ago, as the year seems to have passed so quickly!

Once again our membership hit the 400 mark by the end of the year, matching pre-covid levels. We had several new Groups begin during the year; - However others have closed for various reasons. Sometimes this has been because it is seasonal or falling member numbers and occasionally due to the Leaders ill health. One of the consistent themes though, is that very few members wish to take up the baton and Lead a group. This is a pity, as the U3A exists to enable interest groups to flourish. One area which does continue to grow is Groups based at the Atlantic Racquets Centre in Bideford, which appear to have a strong following.

We have continued our programme of improvements to the 'Upper Room'. To enhance communications and enable computer training, a WiFi unit has been installed which can handle multiple devices.

Harking back to 2023-4 it was agreed to change old sockets out and install an external security light for safety. The electrician also had to replace the main distribution board (condemned as probably pre-war) However in 2025 due to a short circuit when switching off one of the electric fires, the electrician was called back again to review system safety. To make the call out worthwhile, it was agreed to install an additional socket for the new Electric Projector Screen (Donated by Andy Robilliard) and upgrade the old strip lights to LED to improve energy efficiency as part of this work. My thanks to Dave De Burton and Dennis Pavitt for following this up.

For a period we were unable to source a Cleaner for the Upper room, previously this was done by different members, however we have found it necessary to employ a professional to carry out this work.

Looking forward to 2025-6, it is clear that our U3A will have to adapt to the faster pace and financial pressures. In the area of U3A Events, Coffee Mornings are well supported both in member numbers and financially. However the Monthly Lunch has given cause for concern. Feedback has noted variable food quality and cost as one factor, the other being Speakers ( "too many charities" ). A straw poll revealed that attendees wish to retain the Speaker / Lunch concept, even so interesting Speakers do charge a lot more! So we propose the following in conjunction with addressing the food quality. In future, rather than being self-supporting, a budget of £1000 has been set to improve the quality of the speaker, to be paid out of our u3a funds. (This is allowable under charity rules as the Monthly Lunch is available to all our members.)

The other area we intend to address is the Upper Room Charges for 2025. Post Covid, the trustees found it necessary to raise the member cost from £1 to £2 per group session. We have noted some push back from members on this, which has been exacerbated by charges introduced for Bone Hill Car Park. Various options were considered (taking account that the Upper Room ran at a deficit last year due to additional costs). In view of the car park charges, it is proposed to reduce the member charge to £1 per session (To be reviewed in 2026). We recognise this may become a financial hit, but if it encourages more members and groups to use the facilities, it is worthwhile.

This note presents an ideal time to remind you that your Committee is always looking for new ideas, new enthusiastic helpers and Committee members. if you want to step forward for nomination to the Committee, by all means put your name forward to be added to the list of members being elected to the Committee during the AGM.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our group leaders for the hard work they put in to making Torridge U3A attractive to our members. My thanks also go to all the other members of the Committee for their efforts to help keep our U3A on an even keel over the last year.

Graham Thompson

Chair, Torridge U3A