



Edenbridge U3A –February 2021

Newsletter from your Chairman

As the first newsletter of 2021 it is traditional to wish you all a Happy New Year, words that might seem out of place with the current situation we find ourselves in. I hope that not too many of you have been affected personally. On a positive note, I hope many of you will have had your first dose of vaccine against coronavirus and feel that there is, at last, light at the end of the tunnel. Last year, when speaking to many of you, the outbreak of COVID-19 was seen as just a 'blip' that we would soon get over. How wrong we were - perhaps with over 109,000 deaths from COVID-19 we feel a little different now!



But do look around. Today there are reminders of living things carrying on as normal, even though the mild Winter means that our Spring flowers are two months early in their growth! Daffodils in flower in January! Today I watched a magpie collecting twigs for nest building. Don't birds have a calendar? It's too early!

If you listen to comments frequently being made on the TV many of these people talk about us soon being able to return to normal. But what will **normal** look like? Will we ever get back to what we remember as **normal**?

What is certain is that the many scientists in this country have been brilliant in producing vaccines that can give us some immunity against coronavirus. Typical of many viruses, we are now witnessing new variants of the disease appearing but, so far, although they are variants of the original COVID-19 virus, it appears that our vaccines will be effective against them. Many virologists are predicting that we will have to get used to a coronavirus vaccine every year (just like we do for the flu virus now). Is that the new '**normal**'?

Certainly '*staying in*' has been the new **normal** and '*staycations*' are back in fashion as there are so many restrictions to travel worldwide. I know that many of you have loved going on cruises to visit those faraway places. Saga Travel have recently announced that, when they start their cruises again, you will need to have had the two jabs that make up our current vaccination. As well as your UK passport, will the new **normal** be the addition of a vaccine passport to enable you to gain access to the cruise ship and foreign destinations?

In many of the countries in the Far East people have been wearing masks in public for many years before the COVID-19 outbreak. Will this be part of the new **normal** for us in England?

Just a year ago, to mention the word shopping, Tunbridge Wells, Blue Water, Lakeside and Oxford Street would be names that might spring to mind! What a difference 12 months has made – so many big high street names have gone so what will the new **normal** be for shopping post COVID-19? Will shopping centres survive?

Our U3A current membership is wide ranging in ages – the only qualification for membership being that you have retired from full time employment. Perhaps the most dramatic change caused by the pandemic is the number of people who now work from home. So, the patterns of working we were all part of before COVID-19 could be quite different in the future. What will be the **normal** work?

If you have young grandchildren now, they will eventually go on to study history at their secondary school. If you had to compose a couple of pages for a new history book to describe the period from 2019 to 2021 what would you write? Perhaps we could have a 500-word challenge on this later this year?

So, what about our U3A? Sadly, we still cannot meet as a large group and I know that many of you really miss these monthly meetings. Some of our interest groups have been able to continue, particularly when their activities are based outdoors. Many group leaders have set up Zoom meetings or have kept contact with their members through newsletters and phone calls. Do not forget, that while we are in a lockdown situation, U3A nationally is producing a good newsletter. To register to receive a copy go online to www.u3a.org.uk/newsletter.

Sadly, as if things were not bad enough, the scammers see the lockdown as an opportunity to try to steal your money. Remember that vaccinations against COVID-19 are **FREE** from our National Health Service. Any email/message saying that you can get a vaccine for a small charge are scams. If you get a suspicious text message just delete it, and with emails you can check who the sender is by hovering your cursor over the address and, if you suspect it is a scam, you can also forward it to report@phishing.gov.uk. As always, the saying that '*if a deal sounds too good to be true*', the chances are that it is a scam and will only lead to grief!

So, I hope you "**Stay Safe, Stay Alert**" and try to keep in touch with all your friends.

Best wishes

Mike

Mike Collins, Chairman



PS – Summer is coming!

PPS – *Rest in Peace Captain Sir Tom* – you were inspirational!