**Chair’s Report 2022**

When I reflect on this year’s NEOS, I do so with a sense of achievement and gratitude for all the work of the Committee and members. Most of the Committee this year, myself included, were new so it has been a steep learning curve, but we have had some fun, made some new friends and worked together to manage what I hope was a generally successful year for everyone.

We cannot however, look back on September 2022 without acknowledging the impact of a volatile economy, an uncertain global situation with the war in Ukraine, and the death of Queen Elizabeth II. While we had 288 members sign up for NEOS, I am aware that many were affected by these factors and while many members had a great NEOS experience, this was not the case for everyone with some struggling with reduced footfall and sales.

However, despite being in strange times, we were delighted that 65 new members joined us this year, showing that creativity is still thriving in the NE of Scotland and I hope that those of you who were new to NEOS this year, found the experience enjoyable and worthwhile.

**Members survey** – In May this year we issued a survey asking members what they wanted from NEOS. A total of 112 members responded with the largest number indicating that they hoped to gain sales, exposure and visibility from taking part in NEOS as well as meeting other artists and networking. In addition, a large majority were looking for social media posts to attract visitors and about a third of the respondents were seeking training in social media. The follow up survey which was sent out in October, after this year’s NEOS is still being completed but initial results suggest that we met most of these requirements which is a testament to the Committee’s efforts and the support of our members.

**2022 Social Media** – This year, we approached the workload of social media in a slightly different way as we recognised that it was a potentially huge workload for the committee to manage and few of us had the necessary skills, or time, to fully take it on. It was decided that it is too important an aspect of our support to members to let it wither, so we created a social media contract to pay a Social Media Co-ordinator to do a lot of the work. We still retained social media teams to manage the ongoing questions and comments but the Co-ordinator undertook all of the individual posts and the creation and scheduling of the discipline videos. Although we had a few info items on social media during the early part of the year, we started sharing individual entries plus with your postcode and venue no and link to the NEOS website in May. These continued until the end of August when we posted the discipline videos which ended just before NEOS. During NEOS we shared as many posts as we could that you tagged us in but there were issues on both Facebook and Instagram caused to some extent by the Committee not fully realising what needed to be done, but also the usual upgrades to facebook and instagram services which, apparently, results every year in things not working properly during NEOS! So, apologies if we missed you, we did our best and most of us were also trying to do our own open studio event and social media.

Louise very ably took on the role of Social Media Co-ordinator and I hope you will all agree she did a fantastic job. Your Social media teams for this year were Instagram: Mahri, Anne, Catriona; Facebook: Mahri, Suz, Carol; Internal Facebook: myself. I for one have been very grateful to everyone for their time and effort and I am sure you are too.

**Social Media Training** - Following the survey in May, we worked with Business Gateway to put in place a series of face to face and online training sessions to support members in their social media activities. Feedback was excellent and it is hoped to put these in place again in 2023 but earlier in the year to allow members to benefit from the learning well in advance of NEOS.

**Graphics** – You might have noticed that the NEOS graphics were freshened up this year thanks to Charley, our Vice Chair, who not only created some wonderful new graphics, but offered advice and support to any members who required assistance. The aim was to build the NEOS brand with consistent imagery and we hope to continue this in to next year.

**Images** – these are really important so start thinking about them now not in January or February. When it comes to the print advertising – we allow the magazines access to all the makers images to choose the ones they feel are most suitable for their readership – so, think about making yours stand out for next year! There are tips on the NEOS website on the members guide page.

**Print Advertising** – the Committee is aware that not everyone is on social media and this year we took adverts in Artmag, Pushing out The Boat, and the Press and Journal. We also ventured in to the world of radio advertising and ran a ten day campaign with both Original 106 and Waves Radio. We also sponsored a £50 prize in Lifestyle who kindly also did an editorial for us. In addition, we issued press releases to all local and regional press, many of which carried features for us free of charge.

**Visitor’s Survey** – The Visitor’s survey this year is currently out for responses but early indications are that the majority of our visitors were returning customers, who stay local and know of and enjoy NEOS year after year. The book remains one of the most important means of advertising NEOS. There is never enough budget to do as much advertising as we would like so it is essential that we all do our part by spreading the word about NEOS and ensuring the book gets in to the hands of those who really want it is part of that.

**The Book** – We printed 20,000 books this year and were pleased to be able to resume distribution through the library services throughout the area. In our members survey in May, you told us that 50 books per member was about right but of course some of you would have liked more and some fewer. A huge thank you to the PUP’s or Pick Up Points – these members do an amazing job and mean that most of you don’t have too far to go for your books. The cost of the book this year was a challenge with paper costs escalating across the globe. The initial quote in February 2021, went up by £10,000 when we came to print in July, so we had to take the decision to reduce the paper weight in the book and thereby reduce the cost by £5000. Hopefully none of you noticed this change as the book still turned out to be a quality publication but we will face challenges again next year as the cost of living continues to spiral upwards. A big thank you to Phil Thomson, who as usual, did a terrific job in designing the book and in creating the map for us. Thanks also to MMS Almac, our printers in Elgin who also assisted with the distribution of the books across the area.

**The Online Location Guide** – This is a big job requiring a lot of attention to detail and Anne and Connie created the online guide for NEOS using Google maps again for us this year. This was new territory for Connie but together with Anne’s expertise, they made a great team. Thanks to them both for their efforts.

**Website -** The website is essential to the smooth running of the event and this year, the website had it's busiest year this year to date…we almost hit our Bandwidth limit of 100GB! However, the website itself is old and it takes quite a lot of effort on Matt’s part to keep it up and running. I am aware that at the 2021 AGM it was agreed that we should look at rebuilding the website. Business Gateway have been extremely helpful in helping us to scope out what this would mean and they have created a draft tender document for us. The next step is to finalise those documents and get some quotes for the work. We were able to hold on to the budget from this year, and an application to the lottery is in progress as we speak in the hope that we can raise some more money to help develop this important piece of work.

Huge thanks go to Matt Robinson of Wiccans Brae who has continued to monitor and keep us safe online and has kept the website up and running – responding to every question and request for help with patience and good humour!

Thanks also to Alison, who left us earlier this year, for all the work she has previously done to support the website.

**Signs** – With a record number of new members this year, we are now out of yellow signs. Next year we will need to order a new supply and members will be issued with new ones along with the book as usual. This will be a considerable additional expense but an unavoidable one.

**Crak n’Blether** – This year we held a series of face to face and online drop in sessions called Crak n’blether. These were aimed at encouraging members to meet one another, network and to ask questions. The face to face sessions were held in Elgin, Inverurie and Aberdeen and, if these go ahead next year, we will be looking for experienced members to help host these in more geographic locations.

**Member communications** - The regular emails and newsletters that you have received as members throughout the year, have been down to the efforts of Val, our secretary who has kept us all organised and on track! Hopefully you have found the information you have received useful and easy to read – crafting these communications is not easy so huge thanks to Val for all her time and effort in making sure we have all been given information timeously.

**Turriff Show** - Committee members, Carol, Connie, Mahri, Suz, Margaret, Brian and Lynne all attended over the two days of Turriff show at the end of July and handed out books to interested people as well as chatting and explaining what NEOS is all about. A tiring but positive experience!

**Other Governance –**

Committee Insurance – The Committee now has indemnity insurance via Pennykidd Insurance. This means that if anyone should feel it necessary to sue NEOS as an entity, we have some legal protection in place.

Committee Expenses - A formal expenses policy and claim form was agreed and is now being used using HMRC agreed rates for mileage claims.

Finally a massive thanks to all of the Committee who have worked tirelessly to ensure that NEOS 2022 happened. Anne, Liz, Gerrie, Suz, Kimberley, Catriona and Margaret are retiring from the Committee this year. We wish them well and hope to see them in the book in future years! Thank you also to the past chair, Fiona Duckett who has been available with advice and guidance as needed…as a new chair, I have appreciated the support!