

u3a friends

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Introduction from Iain Cassidy

Dear friends,

I am excited to be introducing my first u3a Friends newsletter as your new CEO.

If you are anything like me you will want to know a little bit about where I've come from and why I wanted to join the u3a family. I have been working in the charity sector for more than 20 years now, and over half of that time has been for charities that support older people, including most recently as CEO at Open Age. **This background means I understand how important it is to remain active and social in later life.** I know the positive impact on members' health and wellbeing that comes from joining organisations like u3a and I want to ensure that everyone who wants to can access this amazing movement.

Both at the AGM, and at a u3a Northumbria network event earlier this week, **I have had the opportunity to meet some of you and to see, in practice, the benefit of the skill sharing and volunteer-led model that is unique to u3a.** I am really looking forward to continuing getting out and visiting as many u3as as I can.

The stories in this newsletter reflect the benefits that being part of such a vibrant movement can have, from the impressive contribution members made in the u3a woodland to member Margaret's story about how membership of her local u3a has been so impactful for her.

I'm excited to continue learning about the wonderful things happening across our u3a community and to build on the amazing work that has already been done within the movement.

With very best wishes

Iain Cassidy

Third Age Trust AGM beckons in a new chapter

Our AGM, held earlier this month, saw several momentous changes to The Third Age Trust. We welcomed a new leadership team, with a new CEO, Chair and Vice Chair.

The meeting also saw members vote on a resolution to change the articles of association of the Third Age Trust. This passed with 905 out of 1073 total votes in favour. The Board and staff will now start working towards a new governance structure, which will include a smaller Board and a Council made up of regional u3a representatives. Both will be in place by April 2025. Further updates will be shared in the coming months.



Looking back at our u3a woodland

In a new film, Clive Grace, Chair of Third Age Trust Trading LTD, visits the u3a woodland in the Brecon Beacons. Members have donated over 10,000 trees to the woodland, which was one of many ways we marked our 40th anniversary.

The film features Rob Penn from *Stump Up for Trees* who u3a partnered with for the project. Rob says, "I think it really will start to look and feel like a wood five years from now. You'll walk through here and think, gosh this is a woodland."

He continues, "I think the important thing is that it's all of us together. That's members of the u3a, us at *Stump Up for Trees* and a willing landowner all coming together to completely reignite what you might have described as a slightly dead piece of land. In the decades to come, it's going to be a place rich with biodiversity and we're so excited about that. So thank you."

A new u3a report explores the benefits of non-formal learning

Our new report, *Learn to Live: A blueprint for better health and wellbeing*, launched earlier this month and showcases the positive impact that non-formal learning can have on wellbeing.

Non-formal learning, unlike formal learning, is a mutual experience with no strict hierarchies – everyone shares their skills and learns from each other. The report suggests that this model can help tackle loneliness, encourage social connection, and even improve the health of participants and wider communities. The u3a model embodies the five ways to promote wellbeing – connecting, being active, taking notice, continuing to learn, and giving.

Speaking at the launch event, former Chief Knowledge Officer to the NHS Sir Muir Gray said, "This report is fantastically important. This concept of non-formal learning is, in my view, one of the most important things for the future of health and social care."

It's an absolute delight and a privilege to offer a few words as my first newsletter contribution since becoming Trust Chair. I feel as though I'm standing on the edge of a brand new future for the Third Age Trust and the u3a movement. Rarely has the election of a new Chair coincided with a new CEO, a new Vice Chair, and the introduction of a new governance system.

The success of the Fit for the Future resolution at the recent AGM has opened the door to a u3a Council and a new Trust Board. This, combined with the election of Margaret Fiddes as Vice Chair and appointment of Iain Cassidy as CEO, all signal the start of a new chapter. I am looking forward to exciting challenges ahead.

But, as we know, creating change in the u3a movement is like turning around a huge ocean-going liner – it takes time. So, don't expect immediate changes, but over time I hope that improvements in governance, u3a participation, transparency, and Trust accountability will become more and more apparent. Watch this space.

Renovating a National Trust Garden

The Gardening Group at Barnsley u3a have been working on designing and maintaining a section of the garden at *Wentworth Castle Gardens* in Stainborough.

Gardening group leader Niall says of the design, "We have chosen what we hope is a bright and cheerful planting colour scheme of blues, yellows and whites, reflecting the u3a colours. We have several yellow roses, which traditionally symbolise joy and happiness, two things we hope are part of Barnsley & District u3a."



u3a group gain sponsorship by the Royal Institute of Philosophy

The philosophy group at St Ives u3a have received sponsorship from the *Royal Institute of Philosophy* for the next two years. They are using the funds to host a series of lectures on the Metaphysics of Time and Space for u3a members and the wider public.



Showcasing u3a at Pride

Haslemere u3a publicised the movement with a stall at *Pride in Surrey*, which fell in u3a week. The afternoon was a great opportunity to raise the profile of u3a within their local community and to network with other local organisations.

Piano, writing and new beginnings



Foyle u3a member Margaret shares the impact u3a has had on her life.

I first heard of u3a when they started here in Londonderry in 1992. When I retired, I joined the u3a choir for a year but unfortunately life intervened, as it does, and my membership lapsed for a few years.

After my husband died in 2015, I started to learn piano and watercolour painting in different venues in the City (he left quite a large gap in my life!) As my mobility decreased and parking and access became more difficult, my wise daughters reminded me about u3a. I joined again in September 2022 and have enjoyed every minute since.

I have continued with piano, now through my u3a, and as the sessions are geared to people who are doing it for enjoyment rather than to pass exams, I find I am getting much more out of them. I have also joined the Choir again and a “gentle” exercise class.

For me, the writers group has been the best discovery. It is facilitated by one of the members and the atmosphere is relaxed but encouraging. Everyone is very supportive and I have discovered that I can produce apparently acceptable pieces, especially poems. It is so good to spend an afternoon in the company of like-minded friends and preparing the “homework” for the following week keeps the little grey cells active.



Headline photos: Malvern u3a members Elizabeth, Aidan and Pam appeared on *Only Connect* – their next episode is on Monday 28 October; the new leadership team at the Third Age Trust – Derek Harwood, Treasurer, Margaret Fiddes, Vice Chair, Iain Cassidy, CEO, and Allan Walmsley, Chair; *Small Fishermen* by Chris of Caterham u3a, which he submitted to the u3a eye photography challenge, responding to the prompt *Small*.

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