



Introduction from Iain Cassidy

Dear Friends,

From meeting members and visiting u3as across the country, I know how much being part of u3a means to so many of you. Whether you're a member of one interest group, take part in something different every day, or have taken the leap of being involved in your u3a committee, involvement brings fun, learning, friendship and connection.

In this newsletter, you'll find a survey, u3a and me. Please do take part – the results will help us better understand the ways that members engage with u3a and demonstrate the positive impact of u3a on members' lives.

Earlier this month, we shared the news that *u3a Festival 26* tickets are now available to book. Our biggest event of the year, members will meet together for three brilliant days of learning, sharing and connection. We can now share a bit more detail about some of the activities available at the Festival – read more below.

I know this time of year is an important time for many, with Lunar New Year, Ash Wednesday and the start of Ramadan all taking place this week. To everyone observing one of these events, I hope it's a meaningful time for you.

With very best wishes

Iain Cassidy
CEO of the Third Age Trust

What does u3a mean to you?

We would love to hear about your experience being part of u3a – what you enjoy and how u3a fits into your life. Tell us by completing our survey, *u3a and me*. Your feedback is crucial. The results will be fed back to u3as to help us ensure u3a remains welcoming, flexible and sustainable for years to come.

As our way of saying thanks, everyone who completes the survey can enter a prize draw to win a £100 John Lewis gift card. [Share your thoughts and shape our future.](#)



friends events



u3a Festival 26 – a taster of what's to come

Thank you for the incredible response to u3a Festival 26 tickets. We're currently finalising the programme, but until then, we're delighted to share a list of the activities so far...

Sherburn & Villages u3a member Margaret is part of the Festival organising team. She says, "You might try a new sport such as pickleball or pétanque, enjoy table tennis or walking football, or simply watch and cheer on the teams. There will be some fascinating talks ranging from the Bayeux Tapestry to Egyptology. And of course, plenty of chances to socialise – dancing, quizzes, games and guided daytime walks around the beautiful city of York."

Discover the confirmed activities so far and secure your place – [visit our website and book your tickets today.](#)



friends stories



Our history discussion group covers British, European and international history. Our members agree among themselves what subjects to cover, and which areas to look at within each subject. No prior knowledge of history is needed, only an interest in and enthusiasm for studying history in books, on TV or online.

In our last few sessions, we have been looking at the Normans in England (and sometimes beyond), including the economy and trade, the role of women and the Norman Church.

Timothy, Worthing u3a

The Trust Board will have its first meeting of the year towards the end of this month and the focus will move towards building a budget for 2026/27 and beyond that delivering the Trust's strategic plan.

This means identifying and funding activities that specifically support u3as, and that promote and strengthen the u3a movement.

The initial plans include key areas that have been identified by the Council as priorities to u3as, and the plans will include funding, resource requirements, timescales and measures of success.

In addition, the Board recognises the need for various national projects to develop the organisation and create technological efficiencies. Together, these activities should represent a major step forward in the development of the organisation. The Board will consider and approve the final version of the business plan towards the end of March, and the main focus areas will be communicated throughout the movement.

friends news

from the members...

Malvern u3a go fossil hunting

A unique group at Malvern brings members together to explore the wonders of palaeontology. The group explore the topic through talks, field trips and examining fossils. Armed with hand lenses and microscopes, the members get up close to real fossils.

For some members, this passion has been a lifelong interest while for others, it's entirely new – showcasing that with u3a, you never know what you'll discover next.

Pictured: the group on a field trip to Lavernock point.



u3a research to be published in academic journal

One of the groups learning together through Interest Groups Online is dedicated to working through the first 4,000 years of the English Language. Recently, they had a session dedicated to the early middle English poem, Brut.

The research that they worked on together in the session is now due to be published in the academic journal, *Studies in English Language Teaching*.

Congratulations to the group – a powerful example of what can be achieved when members share their skills and interests.

The freedom of online learning

Interest Groups Online offers the joy and learning available within u3a – but online. For member Annie, it's enabled her to keep learning when meeting in person has been difficult.



It's good for our health and wellbeing to keep as active as possible and maintain our engagement with the wider world. u3a offers great resources – but what if it's difficult or impossible for you to attend face to face meetings?

I have multiple sclerosis, which restricts my life in many ways. *Interest Groups Online* has given me the opportunity to maintain old interests, develop new ones, and to meet new people and make new friends.

I'm a member of the Writing for Pleasure group. I enjoy talking to other people who enjoy writing about writing. The group leader sets us interesting, and sometimes challenging, exercises.

I also lead a Mindfulness, Meditation and Poetry group. I've loved poetry all my life. It's lovely to share poems and discover new poets. Mindfulness has sustained me through my adult life – it's something I can pass on which might help others.

I've enjoyed everything that I've learned with *Interest Groups Online*. Everyone learns from each other, even though we're all starting from different places in terms of experience.

Find out more about [Interest Groups Online](#).

Headline photos: *On the Edge* by Helen, Odiham u3a; Ludlow u3a members photographed by Stuart Knight; Empress Matilda, one of the women featured in the online u3a event *British Women's History Day* on Thursday 12 March.

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