



Introduction from Iain Cassidy

Dear Friends,

It always feels like there's a special community spirit in December; people attending festive parties, celebrating Hannukah and Christmas, and enjoying the fairy lights.

As 2025 comes to an end, it's a fitting time to look back on my first full year as Chief Executive of the Third Age Trust. I've been welcomed by so many of you to summer schools, anniversaries and monthly meetings. I've had lots of conversations about u3a; why it's important now and where it might be going in the future.

So really, I want to say a big thank you for your involvement with u3a, whether that's going to your local u3a interest group or just receiving this newsletter out of interest. It's great to see what u3as get up to all across the movement and to share that with you too. Members have shared their 2025 highlights throughout this newsletter and, at the end, we've decided to showcase some of the u3a stories we've shared this year. The stories and photos highlight the impact that u3a makes to individual members and communities.

I'm looking forward to 2026 with the new ventures and challenges it will bring. A question for you to end the year: what are you looking forward to doing with u3a in 2026? Let me know by emailing communications@u3a.org.uk.

With very best wishes

Iain Cassidy

CEO of the Third Age Trust

Southport u3a recognised for work on local gardens

Southport has just been named as the Best Overall *Britain in Bloom* town. Sefton Council invited all the volunteers to a buffet and awards ceremony. An award was given to Southport u3a's Just One Thing group for their work in Hesketh Park, where the group have planted over 3,000 spring bulbs.



The award is the latest recognition the group have received. In November, their work was recognised with a plaque that reads, 'This border in planted and maintained by members of Southport u3a.' A huge congratulations to Southport u3a for the big impact they make on their town.

Exploring Scottish Heritage

At Fife u3a, a Scottish Heritage group explores the rich history and culture of Scotland through talks and visits. Group leaders Doreen and Dee say, "We see Scottish Heritage as a legacy of our history, land, industry, culture and people. For our group that means we are interested in any aspect of life in Scotland; the past, the here and now, and looking to the future. We learn something new every time we have an event!"

friends highlights

My highlight was joining the u3a in Newcastle now I am retired – enjoying some really good groups with lovely people.

David, Newcastle u3a

My 2026 highlight was playing Pickleball at Stour Valley u3a and bringing my experience in racket sports to support and encourage this brilliant game. Members have grown and continue to grow.

Brian, Stour Valley u3a

Derby u3a had a jam packed 40th anniversary year. As a result, we gained 124 new members and our groups increased from forty to more than fifty. This rise in membership of more than a third was achieved through publicity of Anniversary Events in local newspapers, online media and magazines.

Jane, Derby u3a

My highlight was joining our wonderful Ceilidh Dancing group in Coquetdale u3a. Not only do we have fun learning the dances but we don't stop laughing from beginning to end! It's a brilliant way to meet people too.

Vivienne, Coquetdale u3a

As the Christmas holidays are fast approaching, there's no let up in the workload for the Trust Board. We continue to juggle a wide range of issues about the transition to a new governance model and with our eyes firmly locked on the future. Shaping the Trust's systems and activities and aligning them to create a modern member organisation is a difficult task at any time, but with so many changes and new roles, it is proving challenging.

Setting a vision and mission for the Trust will determine the priorities and range of activities that are possible for the Trust next year, and building them into a business plan forms much of the current workload.

Defining future business systems is also high profile at the moment, particularly looking at the Trust's and u3as' long term IT requirements, including how AI will inevitably play a significant part. Finally, the Board is looking at how its trading activities might be better structured and delivered.

I'm looking forward to the holiday period and I hope you are too. Season's greetings to all u3a members and I hope to see many of you in 2026.

friends impact

u3a meets MP at Westminster

u3a members and Third Age Trust staff met with MP Michael Payne in Westminster to discuss working together to raise awareness about how u3as contribute to their communities. It follows on from Michael's mention of u3a in the House of Commons last month.



Pictured, left to right: Third Age Trust Policy Manager Harriet Radermacher, Arnold u3a Chair Hazel, MP for Gedling Michael Payne, Stansted Mountfitchet u3a member and adviser to the team Pauline, Arnold u3a Vice Chair Viv.

u3a members attend national climate change event

u3a members Eleanor (White Cliffs Country) and Brenda (Cotgrave and District), both part of *the Interest Groups Online Climate Matters group*, attended the National Emergency briefing about climate change. Their involvement shows how the u3a voice can help strengthen messages that matter to members.



Pictured: Eleanor and Brenda at the briefing.

Looking back on u3a stories from 2025

We hope you've loved being a part of the u3a Friends community this year. Here are some of the highlights from 2025. We can't wait to share more u3a magic with you next year.



Members of Wyre Forest u3a were shortlisted at the Community Rail Partnership Awards for their work on Kidderminster Station



u3a members in Scotland met together for the first ever Jamboree for a day of learning and fun



Arnold u3a member Hazel invented Short Lawn Bowls, a more accessible variation of Lawn Bowls.

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Headline photos: Until 24 December, u3a members get 10% off *Riviera Travel* when they name their u3a when booking; Ilkley u3a members at a Christmas wreath workshop; Fife u3a's Scottish Heritage group.