

From the Editor Helen McGlinchey

Welcome to the Mar/April newsletter. Thank you to all those who contributed to this edition. My thanks to the Chair, Jim Livingstone, Barbara McDermott and Ann Hayes for their help & advice.

Contacts

For reasons concerning compliance with General Data Protection Regulation, Belfast u3a is no longer publishing the personal email addresses of Committee Members, including the Newsletter Editor, on the public website. Convenors may be contacted through the website <https://belfast.u3asite.uk/> . Go to the Group tab, find the Group page and click on the convenor's name.

Committee News It's time to update the Belfast u3a constitution.

The Third Age Trust (TAT) in 2021 developed model constitutions for each of the nations within the UK, but many aspects of the new Northern Ireland model do not match those of the current Belfast u3a constitution. The Executive Committee has decided these are good grounds to review and, where appropriate, amend the present constitution.

The first and major issue to address is the quorum for the Annual General Meeting, i.e. the minimum number of members obliged to attend for the proceedings to be valid. Under the current constitution, this is set at 20%. With a current membership of 1220, the quorum requires the presence of 244 members, which is now difficult to achieve with recent growth in number.

Having taken advice from the Charity Commission for NI as well as TAT, the Executive Committee is now stating the intention to put forward a special resolution to change the quorum requirement from 20% to 5%, the most common quorum in many large u3as.

To make such a change in the constitution requires a Special General Meeting (SGM) at which, similarly, a quorum of 20% of members is needed. Now giving the required 21 days notice, the Executive Committee urges you to attend this SGM on 26 March in a sufficient number to make it quorate for voting on the following special resolution:

'THAT the Constitution of Belfast University of the Third Age (u3a) be amended by deleting in Article 7. ANNUAL AND SPECIAL GENERAL MEETINGS -

7.1 'The Annual General Meeting shall be held once a year and not later than 15 months after the preceding Annual General Meeting. At least 21 days notice shall be given in writing

to all members. *A quorum shall be 20% of the paid-up members'* and, replace this with the following:

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7.2 'A Special General Meeting of the u3a may be convened at any time by a resolution of the committee or upon a requisition, signed by at least one-fifth of the members, stating the object of the meeting. A meeting held on such a requisition shall be called by the Secretary of the u3a, giving other members 14 days notice of such a meeting. *A quorum will be 20% of the paid-up members'*. And replace this with the following:

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Belfast u3a 25th Anniversary Celebration – 26 February 2026 – Belfast City Hall

The backdrop was the magnificent Great Hall and certainly the grandeur of the surroundings contributed to setting a wonderful atmosphere right from the very start of proceedings. It is probably true to say that the Prosecco served liberally as members and guests were greeted at the entrance was also an influencing factor. Everyone made directly to catch up with others at the round tables, casting an eye to the wonderfully decorated celebration cake. There was an expectant wait for the arrival of the Lord Mayor, Cllr Tracy Kelly, who swept in exactly on cue and was escorted to meet Ann Hayes, to join up in ceremonial cutting of the celebration cake. A big photo opportunity was taken and then John McQuillan announced a toast to Belfast u3a, it's past and continuing success.



Barbara McDermott, standing in for Jim Livingstone, Belfast u3a Chairperson, took to the podium. She first gave an apology from Jim, who had said he was devastated to have missed the event and expressed gratitude to members for their support and encouragement. He was also quoted as saying 'Indeed, u3a is the best youth club in these parts', his humour being much appreciated with a great round of applause.

The Lord Mayor then addressed the company, commenting on how Belfast u3a had evolved over the past 25 years, how it operates now and its contribution to wider society. She seemed to be genuinely impressed, and Barbara thanked her wholeheartedly for her words of praise and encouragement. Barbara went on to say how much the Operations Team at Belfast u3a appreciated working with Chris McGlone, who as Functions and Exhibitions Manager, makes events like this possible in Belfast City Hall.

Many good people in Belfast u3a contributed to the success of the celebration gathering. The Operations Team is headed up by David Blair and he provided fantastic support to John McQuillan, the Events Co-ordinator, who orchestrated the whole show, right from the very beginnings to what happened on the day. There was a very pleasant audio-visual presentation during the drinks reception. Photos of members taking part in group activities were displayed on big screens around the Great Hall and a String Quartet by Richard Strauss provided the musical background. This was the inspired choice of Sean Canning, the website manager, who executed the production of it all along with his tech team. And, the roving photographers, Trevor Busby and Geoff Crowther, captured many of the delightful moments on camera, which can be pored over when uploaded to the website.

And then a big thanks was given to the so very important front-of-house team, which comprised: Membership Secretary, Mavis Turner; Treasurer, John Nicholson along with Tess Nicholson; Deputy Treasurer, Tom Capper and also Zoe Capper, Groups Co-ordinator, Geoff Crowther; Pauline Prior (ex-Chairperson), Carol Rusk and Bridie Bradley.

Barbara went on to talk about Belfast u3a, a little bit about the past and a little bit more about the present. Belfast u3a is one of 25 u3a groups in Northern Ireland, all registered as individual charities. Adrienne Brown, the current Chairperson of the NI Regional Executive Committee, was acknowledged. But Belfast u3a is not just local; it is part of a UK-wide family of over 1,000 u3a branches, all linked through the Third Age Trust in London. Kate Cowan, who is Head of Information and Advice at the Third Age Trust, was also an invited guest. And sitting close by was Valerie Cobain, Northern Ireland's voice on the Third Age Trust Council. Adrienne, Kate and Valerie were commended for their exceptional work on behalf of u3a.

Casting our minds back about 25 years and remembering the millennium year, when in autumn 2000, Belfast u3a started with an open meeting at Belfast Castle. Ann Hayes and Anne McGovern were among the handful of people attending the initial meetings, when the first three activity groups were formed —Walking, Book Club, and Out and About. Then on 28 February 2001, the Third Age Trust officially welcomed Belfast u3a. Barbara had the original framed certificate to show and noted that we were celebrating 25 years, almost to the day.

Belfast u3a has now grown to over 1,200 members and 70 Activity Groups, which are the heart and soul of what we do. There are 80 or so Convenors, all doing a marvellous job, and the Committee is always listening to members and adapting what is on offer. Some new groups are in the pipeline, one is called 'Ballet for Life' and the second is a 'Musical Theatre Group'. This will bring together the many and varied performing talents in u3a and will no doubt feature on the top line at the next Xmas Party.

In recognition of our impact in the wider domain, it was said that Belfast u3a can speak up for older people and push for better education and opportunities in later life. Belfast u3a is also proud to be part of Age-Friendly Belfast. And, as a UNESCO City of Learning, Belfast certainly stands out, and so does u3a. Patricia Magee, the Learning City Co-ordinator in Belfast City Council was thanked for getting Belfast u3a involved not long ago in an All-Island Exchange event and a UNESCO webinar, showing the world the great work happening right here in Belfast.

In conclusion, Barbara commented 'Well, that's Belfast u3a in a nutshell, it's 25 years strong, and it's still growing'.

Afternoon tea was then served, a delightful selection of sandwiches, savoury bites, cream scones, celebration cake and shortbread. Everyone enjoyed another audio-visual presentation called *A Northern Irish Musical Portrait*.

After tea, David Blair took to the stage as compere and introduced an illuminating talk by Siobhan Casey, The Commissioner for Older People in NI; she spoke about priorities that will guide her work over the coming years. David then announced a surprise happening and Ann Hayes was accompanied on to the stage, where she was given a painting of Belfast Castle with the inscription 'Presented to Ann Hayes in recognition of her excellent contribution as a founding member to the development of Belfast u3a'. Then in a more relaxed vibe, delightful classical guitar pieces were played by the duo, Keith Thompson and Robert Cuthbert. The afternoon's entertainment was rounded off in fine style with the lovely melodic voice of Megan McArthur, who then conducted the Singing for Fun Group in Barnbrack's *Belfast*, with a fitting finale of *Kool and the Gang's* song *Celebration*.



Wow! what can be said that would do all of this justice. Valerie Cobain took the microphone and said how enjoyable the afternoon had been and that Belfast u3a's 25th Anniversary celebration has really shown what happens when a community like ours comes together and keeps learning, no matter the age. Barbara McDermott, referring to what Siobhan Casey had to say about the environment for older people, re-iterated that u3a does indeed fulfil an important role in our society. And now, by reaching out to new neighbourhoods and connecting with outside networks, Belfast u3a will go on keeping vibrant. And it is hoped you will agree that Belfast u3a is not just celebrating the past, it is celebrating the present and also setting up to maintain an important position for the future in the community life of Belfast.

Belfast u3a Website from the Web Admin Team

Belfast u3a Website

<https://belfast.u3asite.uk/>

(You can also find the website by googling Belfast u3a)

As part of celebrating the success of our Belfast u3a 25th Anniversary event at City Hall, we would love to share a selection of photographs on our website. These images help us showcase the spirit of our community and the wonderful contribution of our members. To enable this, we have created an event QR code (see image below). When you point your mobile phone camera at this image, it will show a link below it, you may have already used this procedure subscribing to some online streaming services like *Netflix/Prime* etc. on your television or you may have a QR reader application installed on your device, if not the reader application can be downloaded, if using an *Android* device from the *Google Play Store*, or if it's an *Apple* device from *Apples official APP Store*. If you click this link it will allow you to then upload your photos to a secure shared folder. If you have any problems uploading your photos , please contact the Web Administration team via the web sites contact page.



If you do agree to upload your photos from the event using the above QR code , if possible, can you ask the people in the photos for their permission for their photo to be possibly used on the *Belfast u3a* website.

By uploading using the QR code, and for GDPR purposes you are giving permission for Belfast u3a to store and use those images for the stated purposes—typically things like event galleries on website. You can withdraw your permission at any time. If you later change your mind, Belfast u3a will stop using your images in any new materials, though we don't need to recall anything already published.

[ICO Guidelines](#) - Information referring to the UK GDPR guideline

Two New Features Coming To The Website Soon

1. Website News , this will display information and links to new features which will become available soon to the Belfast u3a website. The first one will be a **How To Do** page , this again is in cooperation with AbilityNet and the BT Group who partnered with Belfast u3a to successfully run the **Get to Know Your Digital World** sessions this year, which will be continued later this year , it will allow you to view free Webinars and to download information sheets on many digital subjects from *Getting to know your Smartphone/Tablet to How to shop safely on-line*.
2. Group News, This new section of the website will highlight the activities of the many groups that comprise the Belfast u3a, but from a different perspective than the current group page. There will also be a *Group of the Month* feature where one of these groups will have the opportunity to tell you the viewer more about their group and their activities. It will also be where you see announcements about new groups that are being formed with links to further information about that group.

Information on Monthly Meetings

Monthly Meetings in the Balmoral Hotel, Blacks Road, Dunmurry, Belfast BT10 ONF.

Please note that monthly meetings are usually held on the last Thursday of the month at 11.00h.

Tea/coffee is served from 10.15. We will send out a reminder a week before the meeting.

THURSDAY 26 MARCH 11.00 am, The Balmoral Hotel (Tea/coffee from 10.15)

We are delighted to announce that the speaker coming to talk at the next monthly meeting on March 26th, is Dawson Stelfox. Dawson, on the 27th of May 1993, was the first Irish person to reach the summit of Mount Everest. He was the leader of that expedition, which contained climbers from both jurisdictions. The title of his talk is *Friends in High Places* and will cover not only his conquest of the world's highest mountain, but his background as an architect in helping to develop schools and infrastructure in Nepal.

We are very lucky to have such a high-profile speaker with so many interesting stories.

Remember that the March meeting is going to double as an opportunity to amend our constitution so we need as many attendees as possible to reach the current quorum. Please show your support and join us to hear about Dawson's adventures.

THURSDAY 30 APRIL 11.00 am, The Balmoral Hotel (Tea/coffee from 10.15)

The April speaker is now confirmed as Brian Rowan, the BBC correspondent. Many of you will remember his presentation a couple of years ago when he described his involvement in the Good Friday Agreement and the Peace Process. For April, he has chosen the working title *A world that has lost its way - telling our story elsewhere*

With current events as they are, he is once again 'on point'. Knowing Brian and his style of delivery, we are guaranteed an entertaining and informative talk.

Membership Cards with Barcodes

The membership secretary issued everyone with a new membership card which now bears a unique barcode. These cards are required to be shown at the monthly meetings as they will be scanned upon entry to the meetings. If anyone does not have access to a printer or smartphone, please get in touch with the membership secretary and a card will be provided.

Group News

Pilates 3 Group – from Rosemary Thomas

There is space available in the Wednesday class , from 12.45-1.45 in Belvoir Activity Centre. If interested, contact the convener.

Rambling with a Sketchbook - from Judith Loder

Hi....have you got the gear to cope with local weather and the inclination to practice your sketching or indeed painting skills outside? Do join in with the Rambling Sketchers. We travel independently, bringing our own materials, meeting up at the venue around 10.30/11.00am. We visit gardens, parks, town and village centres, markets, riversides and coasts and head for galleries or the museums when the weather is awful. If you join in, I'll give you my mobile number so you can locate me on site.

Once at the venue we disperse for a couple of hours to do our own art thing having agreed when and where we are going to meet up again. That might be in a café or pub, or we might just be eating our own packed lunch outside.

Part of the craic is a show and tell. This is not about good, better and best artistic efforts; it's just fascinating how different we all are in our approach to things and the materials we choose to use. Be very clear I am hopeless at sketching – it's not 'my thing', that's why I started this group, but I do enjoy the outdoors and the discipline of looking at things very closely.

So, when do we meet up? Since January we have met up in Belfast City centre, Ballywalter Harbour and the Ulster Museum. And from May to September meet- ups are planned for Cregagh Glen, Greyabbey , Hazelbank, Killyleagh and Killynether Woods at Scrabo – not necessarily in that order. I have a schedule of meets ups available for the next few months. Contact me by email via the u3a website and I'll send it to you or watch out for me at the monthly meeting and collect a schedule from there

I hope you've got the picture!

Informal Bridge Group – from Pat McNamee



Mon and/or Fri 2 to 4 pm in the convenor's house. Contact Pat McNamee tel 02890612942

New members who have learnt basic knowledge of bidding and play and who wish to practice their play in an informal setting are very welcome. Queries about bidding and play can be discussed in a relaxed atmosphere though members should have enough knowledge to bid and play without constant teaching and advice. If needed beginner's courses are available elsewhere. You do not need to come with a partner.

Garden Visits Group - from Rosemary Thomas

Emerging from hibernation, the group's first visit of the year will be in April.

Classical Music Appreciation Group – from Keith Thompson



At our March meeting we will conclude our journey through opera by listening to and thinking about Leonard Bernstein's ever-popular *West Side Story*, and in particular examine how cleverly the music is constructed. This will be preceded by a short recording of Bernstein discussing the increased ambiguity and expressivity which could be achieved as music became chromatic during the Romantic period. In April we will listen to a very different but nevertheless revolutionary work, the music to the ballet *The Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky.

Meetings are on the second Tuesday of the Month (10 March, 14 April) 10.30-12.30 in Finaghy Community Centre.

Mindfulness Group – from David Blair



There is a Weekend Retreat planned for the weekend of 17, 18 and 19 April at the beautiful Retreat and Conference Centre at Tobar Mhuire in Crossgar.

There are only a couple of places left so please get in touch ASAP if you would like to join us. All accommodation and food is included along with some non-impact aerobics and some gentle movement and breathwork. The total cost will be about £300. Some knowledge of Mindfulness practices is required so that you can derive most benefit from the weekend. Please contact David on mindfulnessu3abelfast@gmail.com

Photography Group – from A. Ross



The continuing bad weather restricts the ability of the group to hold outings although the group continues to meet every 2 weeks on Zoom to review and comment on photographs members have taken. They continue to take photographs on a specific letter, for February the letter was S and photographs on such things as snowdrops, Scrabo Tower, a swan and a murmuration of starlings were reviewed and commented on. For March the letter is T. Now that the weather is starting to improve, the group are looking to restart their outings.

The Last Word Group – from Hilary Davidson

We meet Fridays 1.30 - 3.00 Shaftesbury Community Centre

Myths & Legends Group – from Mavis Turner

This group meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month in Clonduff Community Centre from 2pm until 3.30pm. Recently the group has been using Stephen Fry's book *Heroes* to continue with the topic of *The Greek Myths*. Stephen Fry makes the stories easy reading and accessible.

New members to this group will be made welcome, either come along at the time mentioned or get in contact with me for further information.

Golf Group – from Jim Lowry



Our season got underway this year with our annual pre season get together in Castlereagh Hills GC in February to primarily discuss and agree which courses we plan to play this year. It was great to see a number of new faces and to meet up again with fellow U3a golfers. After some discussion, and a poll, this year's draft programme is as follows :-

24th March Kirkistown Castle

6th May Whitehead.

3rd June. The Blackwood

1st July. Helen's Bay

5th August Carrickfergus

September Trip to North Coast

Potentially Portstewart Riverside, Bushfoot or Ballycastle details TBA.

Strength, Balance & Beyond Group – from Doris Gentemann

I was chuffed with the feedback from the first run of Strength, Balance & Beyond, especially where people incorporated exercises into their daily routine (which is my mission in life: Make it part of your routine, and it's so much easier to keep it going - little and often!). Here's some of what people said:

"I notice I trip less when I walk."

"I can now stand for longer on my weaker leg."

"I am keeping your exercises going on and off through the day [while] peeling veg, cleaning my teeth, ironing, and sitting down sloooooowly."

"I really enjoyed the sessions - thought the content was worthwhile & that you are a wonderful instructor with a great sense of joie de vivre." (Mmmh... that's a bit more than I expected, but we do have fun in those classes!)

So, we're running the new groups from mid-March to the very end of April.

I say "we", because 2 *Royal Avenue* have been very good to us in providing a space at consistent weekly times, and they'll do this again. Also, Geoff, Patsy and others have helped me figure out the Beacon computer system, so I expect my emails to group members will now be a lot more consistent! And I can only do the classes because they're insured as a U3A peer group.

That said, I bring tons of skills and knowledge, from *TaiChi / ChiKung*, dance, teaching, psychology, plus one huge motivation: bad falls, and people unable to get back up off the floor, should simply not be a thing! The good news is that people can learn balance at any age. Same goes for training our muscles.

No matter which bits of your body are a bit wonky, there is always a way of exercising, for better strength, balance, flexibility, mobility -- doable, and with fun. So, do join one of the new classes if you can fit it in: Wednesday or Thursday, 2-3pm, from 18th/19th March to 29th/30th April. It is not necessary to attend the full set of classes, so long as you pick a few exercises to practise at home. Little and often does add up!

Concert/Theatre Group – from Maureen Pimley



1. Lyric Theatre. ***Tea in a China Cup*** by Christine Reid. Sunday 24th May 2026. 2.30pm. £15.00 TBC.

First Booking Closed.

Second Booking Closed.

2. Lyric Theatre. ***Steel Magnolias*** Sunday 21st June 2026. 2.30pm £15.00 TBC.

First Booking Closed.

Second Booking Closed

3. Grand Opera House. ***Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*** A Summer Youth Production. Friday 17th July 2026. 1.00pm. £25.00.

Booking Open

4. Grand Opera House. ***High Society*** by Cole Porter. Wednesday 12th August 2026. 2.30pm. £58.00 TBC.

Booking Closed.

5. Grand Opera House. ***Carmen*** by Bizet with Northern Ireland Opera. Saturday 19th September 2026. 2.30pm. £65.00 TBC.

Ukelele Group – from Geoff Crowther

On the 12 May we are going to host all the u3a ukulele groups in NI region at a big ukulele jam in 2 Royal Avenue.

Belfast u3a Strummers and the Foyle ukulele group are jointly organising the event.

It will be running from 1100 – 1500 with a break for lunch so even if you don't play ukulele come along and enjoy the craic!

Play Reading Group – from Sharon Adair

The Playreading group would welcome any members who wanted to enjoy reading the works of wonderful playwrights.

The group have had a very enjoyable few months reading the works of Oscar Wilde.

In the coming weeks, we'll be deciding on the future plays to read in spring.

All Weather Walking Group – from Brenda McHugh



The All Weather Walking Group has had a very few unprecedented cancellations this winter. We were lucky enough to have some brief *Windows* of slightly drier conditions and we certainly made use of them!

I would like to use this platform to offer advice to potential walkers (and existing walkers).

Please try to find the All Weather Walking Group on the Belfast u3a website.

Here you will see details of forthcoming walks for all types of walking group - from Scramblers, to Not The Monroes, Ramblers Plus, Ramblers and Amblers.

There is also a brief description of the type of walking which each group offers, as well as guidance about the responsibilities walkers need to consider when choosing which group suits their needs and abilities.

Contact can be made with the convenors for each of the groups via the website if further clarification is needed.

In addition, each of the group's Convenors send emails about their upcoming walks. This is an opportunity to share information which is not given on the public forum of the website.

We are looking forward to TWO Walking Breaks this Spring. These are not posted on the website because they are for walking group members, but it illustrates what a vibrant and thriving group we are!

Creative Writing Group – from Dorothy Byrne

The Creative Writing group continues to meet each Monday in Ormeau Road Library between 2-4 pm. The majority of members attend regularly, and each story or poem is well received by those present.

A *WhatsApp* Site has also been established for group members so that stories can still be accessed by those who were absent from any of the weekly sessions. Thanks to Anjali Kusurkar for undertaking this on behalf of the group.

Recently, and as the result of one of our publications in the last u3a magazine entitled *The Vase*, the Convenor, Lena McCann was contacted by some members of other u3a's in England asking about its format. They are contemplating applying the same process with their groups. Indeed, it was an enjoyable experience to have contact with other u3a members on a national level.