



Minutes of the 24th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Belfast u3a for the year ending 31 March 2025 held on Thursday 29 May 2025 at 10.30h in the Balmoral Hotel.

All relevant documents (Agenda, Minutes of the 2024 AGM, Business Secretary's Report, Treasurer's Report with Statement of Accounts and Independent Examiner's Report, Trustees' Report, Nominations for Committee Election) were placed on the Belfast u3a website on 15 May and will remain there until the end of June.

1. Welcome and Introductory remarks from the Chairperson

Jim Livingstone welcomed everyone and presented a few highlights of the year. Belfast U3A continued to thrive and grow significantly, a 10% increase being seen in membership, to a current total of 1125. While many members have been with us for some time, a warm welcome was extended also to new members. Executive Committee members continue to increase their commitment to keeping up with administrative and digital developments. The bi-monthly Newsletter was sent by email or post to all members. With 97% of members accessible by email, this means that most individuals are digitally included. Other methods of communication now include frequent emails through the Beacon (membership management) system introduced in January 2020, regular activity news updates on the Website and news entries on social media outlets run by the Third Age Trust.

The annual membership subscription was reviewed, in terms of methods of payment and size of the subscription, for the coming year. Decisions were made by the Executive Committee aimed at ensuring the Charity remains adequately funded and has sufficient reserves. As a consequence, there will be no change in the membership fee for the coming year.

In keeping with the U3A movement, over 65 Interest Groups remain the lifeblood of Belfast u3a. Each year new groups emanate from the membership, based on requests and on the knowledge and skills of members themselves. New groups established in the past year include a 'Singing For Fun' group, which attracted over 70 expressions of interest and has begun regular meetings. Annual meetings with Convenors continued in April 2024 and October 2024, and were well welcomed and well attended. The Executive Committee appreciates these special volunteers who give so much of their time, skill and energy to leading activities and discussions on a regular basis.

Strategically, the Executive Committee has identified and continues to pursue several key priorities for future development which are focused on (a) enhancing accessibility to Group activities and other events by members with a disability, (b) strengthening marketing capability to ensure optimum membership for people living in all parts of the city of Belfast, and (c) building greater support and sustainability for the Executive Committee to fulfil its administrative and management functions. Work continues to achieve these objectives over the coming years.

A new official postage address for Belfast U3A was established in March 2025 using the services of MBE Office Services in Belfast.

Concluding, in what the Chairman described as an ‘incredible year’, Belfast u3a continues to grow and develop, with members learning new skills and knowledge, as well as exploring new opportunities for living a full and active life. He thanked everyone for their contributions.

2. Apologies for absence

Anna Murray, Elbha Walmsley, Andrew Walmsley, Elizabeth Baillie, Elizabeth McKeown.

3. Minutes of AGM 2024

Adoption of Minutes

Proposed by: Neil McQuillan Seconded by: Mark Hewitt

4. Business Secretary’s Report

In the Secretary’s Report, Barbara McDermott covered three main points: Committee structure and membership, Meetings and Events, Support and Thanks.

Committee Composition Following the last AGM which took place on 30 May 2024, there was little change in membership, such that a substantial amount of relevant experience was carried forward. Among the officers were: Jim Livingstone (Chairperson), Margaret Stirrup (previously on Committee, Margaret took up the post as Vice-Chairperson, also doing the Membership Secretary job), Barbara McDermott (Business Secretary), Neil McQuillan (Treasurer). And the other members were: Tom Capper (Deputy Treasurer), Helen McGlinchey (Newsletter Editor), Geoff Crowther (Groups Co-Ordinator), John McQuillan (Events Organiser), David Blair (Speakers Organiser), Patsy Torney (Beacon Administrator). Helen is now at the end of a 3-year term, but it was agreed by Committee (on 19 May) that she will be co-opted to serve for another year, to continue her job of collating information for the Newsletter. John Nicholson was co-opted in January 2025, coming with an accountancy background, to assist with increased fiscal activity. Ann Hayes continued to sit on Committee, bringing expertise and knowledge as a Founder Member of Belfast u3a. Looking towards this coming year, two resignations take effect today. Firstly, Neil McQuillan who, in his three years in the Treasurer role, made a substantial contribution by re-organising financial recording practices. Belfast u3a owes him a great debt of gratitude for everything which he has done. Secondly, Margaret Stirrup stands down as Vice-Chairperson and Membership Secretary, though she will continue for her 3rd year taking a lead on the Marketing strategy. It is concerning to see that six people (of the usual complement of 12 members) will come to the end of office in May 2026. A appeal was sent out to encourage people to consider joining the Committee and to speak to current members about what is involved.

Committee Meetings Throughout the year, there were eight meetings of the Executive Committee (2024 - 17 June, 16 Sept, 21 Oct, 18 Nov and 2025 - 13 Jan, 10 March, 14 April, 19 May), which took forward the main business of the organisation. And increasingly, there is a considerable amount of work for the Operations Sub-Committee, which was constituted about a year ago. Much of its current business deals with planning for events to mark the 25th anniversary of Belfast u3a in the coming year. There will be a number of events to map on to significant things which

occurred 25 years ago. The big event of the year was announced at the end of March. This will take place in the City Hall on 26 February 2026, the date being close to that when full membership of the Third Age Trust was granted (on 28.02 2001). The Committee is grateful to the Belfast City Council for their kind generosity in providing the venue and a contribution to costs.

General Meetings with invited speakers have become increasingly popular, attracting up to 180 people. The popularity is undoubtedly down to the varied and totally fascinating series of talks organised by David Blair. Highlights included the interview with Declan Lawn, one of the writers of 'Blue Lights', the popular police drama. David asked pertinent questions, giving Declan an excellent platform to give a detailed 'behind the scenes' perspective. The other one mentioned was that of Neil O'Brien from Victus Energy, who talked about the emergence of biomethane as a fuel for delivering a greener, cleaner future.

Group Convenors' Meeting With now in the region of 65 groups, there is always a need to keep Convenors up to date with the wider issues in Belfast u3a and to hear their views. The Groups Co-ordinator, Geoff Crowther, has done a great job of this, in what is a complicated role. Geoff chaired the meeting held in Castlereagh Golf Club on 30 October. A major part of the discussion centred on ideas for groups, individually or together, to mark the 25th anniversary and a number of ideas came forward: for example, a Belfast u3a history booklet, organising media interviews, Heritage walk finishing with a BBQ, screening a movie made in 2001, Website pages for each Group to tell their story. If some funding is needed, at least a contribution can be obtained by application to the Committee.

The *New Members' meeting* was held on 4 November in St John's Halls on the Ormeau Road. As Membership Secretary, Margaret Stirrup introduced the programme and many of the Committee members were there to speak about how they fitted into the organisation. Margaret has had a very busy year, dealing with all the correspondence and paperwork involved in welcoming new people. In fact, in the past financial year, there were just short of 100 new members, a 10% increase from the number on the same date in the previous year. It was a mammoth task for Margaret, which is very much appreciated.

Social Events To mark the end of the Belfast u3a year, the Committee extended the usual hospitality at the General Meeting held on the 27th June. After the excellent talk given by Anne Dines about her travelling with friends in Japan, about 160 members and friends enjoyed a light buffet lunch. The beginning of the year in September got off to a great start with the first General Meeting on the 26th, which happened to fall in the middle of National u3a Week. To make it a memorable occasion, a good selection of scones and sweet treats were served along with the hot drinks before the meeting. The big event of the year was the Xmas party on 17 December. There was a tremendous turnout, with nearly 200 in attendance. A buffet lunch was served, and this was followed with a couple of hours of festive entertainment led by David Blair. Thanks are also due to John McQuillan who was responsible for liaison with the hotel and a myriad of other things which made the event so successful.

Support and Thanks Liz Hunter as Website Administrator plays the central role in keeping it all up to date. She has carried out a huge amount of work in the last year along with Campbell Morrison, Mary Rose McBrien, Irene Cauley, Teresa McVeigh and Mairead McGouran. Their task was to transition the website content onto a new platform, which came live in September 2024. The new website provides a more customer-friendly interface and enhanced content. There are lots of

photos illustrating just how much interest and energy there is around in Belfast u3a. The Website Administration Team was thanked for all they had done. The front-of-house team at General Meetings, including those who greet people at the door, do the signing-in and help with the tea/coffee service, were recognised as giving invaluable service.

In summary, this year has benefited from the work and commitment of a solid crew of Committee members, who work well together. Membership has increased significantly and there are plans in place to diversify where and what activities are offered next year. All of this will happen within the frame of celebrating Belfast u3a's 25th anniversary.

4.1 Adoption of Report

Proposed by : Rosemary Thomas

Seconded by : Tom Capper

5. Treasurer's Report

Neil McQuillan's term as Treasurer began on 16 May 2022 and ends at this AGM. In conducting the tasks associated with being Treasurer over the past 3 years, he was aided by Tom Capper, Deputy Treasurer, by Jim McDonnell and Margaret Stirrup, Membership Secretaries and latterly by the prospective incoming Treasurer, John Nicholson. He passed on his thanks to them all for their help throughout his term. And, as he was also stepping down from the Committee, he relayed thanks to all its members, past and present. Lastly, he thanked each and every member of Belfast u3a for endeavouring to comply with missives regarding the methods for conducting payments.

Examination and Approval of Accounts The accompanying accounts were completed and approved by the Trustees on 19 May 2025 and the report by the Charity's Independent Examiner was also completed on that date.

Re-organisation of financial recording practices As a major goal in this term of office, it was considered prudent to have the u3a funds held on behalf of Group Activities to be fully separated from those held for all other u3a activity. In the Banking system this has entailed holding funds in the Groups Account (for Group activities) and the Main Account (for all non-group related U3A activity – e.g. memberships, room hire, paying for speakers, IT expenses, etc). This is better practice, provides more clarity and will greatly facilitate the administration of the Treasurer function. Hopefully everything achieved along with the full implementation of Beacon as the sole financial recording system, will allow for a more seamless transition for the incoming Treasurer. It has certainly proved extremely useful to date.

Group Activities Relevant funds, delegated to be used only for the activities of each individual group, are ringfenced from central Belfast u3a funds and are not transferred between groups. Group activity has increased significantly, mainly due to the formation of a number of additional groups and the large increase in membership. With all Group financial activity now separated from other monies (both on Beacon and within the Banking accounts), it is easier to ensure that all Group activity is being correctly recorded and accounted for.

Membership Numbers have increased again this year to the point where there are well over 1,100 members. Signing up for Direct Debits is encouraged (to reduce the amount of work associated with administration) as is Gift Aid, which generates a considerable sum for the organisation (£2,698 this year).

Impact of Receipts and Payments on Operating Surplus All financial transactions (in or out) are recorded on Beacon at a point in time as close as possible to when they occur on the Banking system. The aim has been to have balances in the Banking and Beacon systems totally aligned, which allows for absolute transparency and, more importantly, for a system that can be readily understood by people with only a basic knowledge of accountancy.

Expenditure Room hire for the General Meetings in the Balmoral Hotel remains one of the larger costs, with the full outlay over the year of £5,340. Overall, the surplus for the year was £517. The Charity needs to retain reserves to protect from unforeseen events. There is an adequate level to support the next financial year and to fund the additional expenditure anticipated in the special anniversary year. In the past year, a couple of groups have been helped in purchasing equipment and in start-up funds. Any group, especially new ones, are encouraged to make a case for one-off additional funds, especially to help in starting up, which can be a difficult period. The Committee will take a pragmatic, but generous, view of any applications.

Fixed Asset Schedule The statement of Fixed Assets attached records equipment used by Belfast u3a in providing services to its members and associated depreciation.

5.1 Adoption of Report

Proposed by: David Blair

Seconded by: Jim Livingstone

6. Election of Officers and Committee Member (Valerie Cobain)

The Chairman thanked Neil McQuillan for his report and welcomed Valerie Cobain, the Council Member for NI at the Third Age Trust, who said she was delighted to be present.

By way of introduction, Valerie gave a short overview of the changes which have taken place recently in the Trust. In addition to the Board of Trustees which deals particularly with governance issues, a u3a Council has been set up to act as a conduit between the membership and the Board, feeding members' views and priorities into the Trust's strategy. As NI representative, Valerie would communicate developments to the local u3as and take any matters raised to the Board.

Then, in taking forward the process of elections to Belfast u3a Committee, it was stated firstly that the membership was given advance notice on 16 April of the vacancies (Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer and one Ordinary Member) which were available. The following nominations were received by the deadline of 9 May.

Officer (Vice Chairperson): Brendan McBrearty (also as Speakers Organiser) for a period of 2 (+2) years - Nominated by Jim Livingstone; Seconded by Barbara McDermott.

Officer (Treasurer): John Nicholson (co-opted to Committee in January 2025) for a period of 2 (+2) years - Nominated by Neil McQuillan; Seconded by Tom Capper.

Committee Member: Mavis Turner (also as Membership Secretary) for a period of 3 years - Nominated by Carol Rusk; Seconded by Elizabeth McKeown.

No voting was required as nominations did not exceed the vacancies; these nominees were duly appointed to Belfast U3A Executive Committee.

The current Chairperson, Jim Livingstone, on competition of 2 years as an Officer, was re-elected for a further period of 2 years (under Section 6.2.4 of the Belfast u3a Constitution). Similarly, the current Business Secretary, Barbara McDermott, on competition of 2 years as an Officer, was re-elected for a further period of 2 years. No voting was required for these positions. Neil McQuillan

(Treasurer, 2022 - 2025) resigned and was thanked for the magnificent work he did on behalf of Belfast u3a over the past 3 years.

Other members remaining on Committee are: Tom Capper (Deputy Treasurer), Geoff Crowther (Groups Co-Ordinator), David Blair (Chair: Operations Sub-Committee), John McQuillan (Events Organiser), Patsy Torney (Beacon Administrator), Helen McGlinchey (Newsletter Editor) - 3-year term completed, to be co-opted for 2025-26, Ann Hayes (Non-voting Founder Member).

7. Closing remarks by the Chairperson

Finally, Jim Livingstone thanked everyone who has worked very hard over the past 12 months on behalf of the whole Membership, and reminded those present that volunteers are still needed, so he was making an earnest plea for more to come forward in the future.

Signature _____
Geoff Crowther (Acting Chair)

Date _____ (AGM 2026)