

Business Secretary's Report for AGM 2026

This report covers three main points: Committee Structure and Membership, Meetings and Events, Member Communication.

Executive Committee 2025-26

At the AGM on Thursday 29 May 2025, Committee Officers, Jim Livingstone (Chairperson) and Barbara McDermott (Business Secretary) were re-elected for a further 2 years. Jim resigned in March 2026. John Nicholson, having been co-opted in January 2025, was elected as Treasurer for 2(+2) years: Brendan McBrearty was elected as Vice-Chairperson for 2(+2) years. Brendan resigned in October 2025.

Tom Capper (Deputy Treasurer), David Blair (Speakers Organiser), Geoff Crowther (Groups Co-Ordinator), John McQuillan (Events Organiser) and Margaret Stirrup continued into their 3rd year, and Patsy Torney (Beacon Administrator) into a 2nd year, of a 3-year term. Margaret resigned from Committee in November 2025 and it is with sincere regret that we learned of her death a few weeks later. Margaret gave invaluable service to Belfast u3a Committee over 3 years as Vice-Chairperson, Membership Secretary and laterally, Marketing Lead, and involved herself enthusiastically in Group activities. Mavis Turner took over from Margaret as Membership Secretary for a 3-year term. Ann Hayes continued to sit on Committee, bringing expertise and knowledge as a Founder Member of Belfast u3a.

Helen McGlinchey (Newsletter Editor) having completed a 3-year term was co-opted for one year at the following Committee meeting in June 2025. In September 2025, Sean Canning was co-opted, to act as Website Manager. And, in early 2026, Trevor Busby, Nick Acheson, John Meikleham and Andy Mayhew attended as Observers.

Committee met in 2025 - 16 June, 15 September, 20 October, 17 November, and in 2026 - 17 January, 16 February, 23 March, 20 April, 18 May.

Events and Meetings

Social events

In this, the 25th year of operation of Belfast u3a, the Executive Committee organised a variety of activities and events to celebrate this important milestone. The beginning of the year in September got off to a good start with the first General Meeting on the 25th, which happened to fall in the middle of National u3a Week. This an annual event organised to showcase the activity, learning and fun which takes place every day across the movement. Members enjoyed a selection of baked goods and hot drinks before the meeting.

The Christmas Party was held on 16 December at the Balmoral Hotel. Almost 200 members attended and were impressed by the first 'Belfast u3a's Got Talent', organised by John McQuillan, in which various Groups and individual members put on a great show. This included music from the Ukulele and Singing for Fun Groups, folk dances from the ballet Giselle, and readings of poetry and composition. It was a particularly enjoyable event, followed by a buffet lunch and further entertainment.

The major celebration of the year took place in Belfast City Hall on the afternoon of 26 February 2026. This date was chosen more or less to match the date that full membership of the Third Age Trust (TAT) was granted (on 28.02 2001). We are grateful to the Belfast City Council for their kind generosity in providing the venue and a contribution to costs, and to the Lord Mayor, Cllr Tracy Kelly, for hosting the event. To start proceedings, Cllr Kelly was joined by Ann Hayes in ceremonial cutting of the celebration cake and John McQuillan announced a toast to Belfast u3a, its past and continuing success. Barbara McDermott, standing in for the Chairperson, Jim Livingstone, welcomed members and invited guests, who were: Kate Cowan (TAT Head of Information & Advice), Valerie Cobain (NI representative on TAT Council), Adrienne Brown (Chairperson of the NI u3a Regional Executive Committee), Siobhan Casey (Commissioner for Older People for NI - COPNI) and Patricia Magee (Learning City Coordinator and Policy and Performance Analyst at Belfast City Council). Thanks were given to the many people who contributed to organisation of the event: Chris McGlone (Functions and Exhibitions Manager at Belfast City Hall) and Belfast u3a Committee, particularly John McQuillan (Events Organiser), David Blair (Chairperson of the Operations Sub-Committee) and Sean Canning (Website Manager), and also the front-of-house team. 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 elaborate further about Belfast u3a, its past and present. After afternoon tea was served, there was an illuminating talk by Siobhan Casey (COPNI), who spoke about priorities that will guide her work over the coming years. Then, in a surprise happening, Ann Hayes was presented with 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'. The afternoon concluded with musical entertainment from a guitar duo and the Singing for Fun Group.

[Information sessions](#)

[Group Convenors' Meeting](#)

There was a meeting and lunch for Group Convenors on 17 September. This year was special, in that the event was held in Belfast Castle, the place where an open day was organised in the Autumn of 2000 to begin the creation of Belfast u3a. Convenors were joined for lunch by Committee members, past and present, to recognise all contributions to the evolution and prosperity of the organisation.

[New Members' meetings](#)

Two meetings for new members were held, on 20 and 24 November 2025, in St John's Halls on the Ormeau Road; 49 people attended overall. Mavis Turner introduced the programme and this was followed by a welcome from Jim Livingstone. Barbara McDermott talked about her pathway from joining Belfast u3a to being elected to Committee in an administrative role. Sean Canning highlighted the valuable resource of information to be found on the Website. As Treasurer, John Nicholson gave a brief overview of the financial picture and membership matters. Geoff Crowther outlined the breadth of Group activities available and how to join up, leading into an interesting Q/A session. In addition to these events, Mavis Turner greets new members at the General Meetings, taking a few minutes to make them feel particularly welcome.

General meetings with invited speakers

The General Meeting, usually held on the last Thursday of each month at the Balmoral Hotel in Dunmurry, is a great opportunity to catch up over coffee with friends and acquaintances and to meet new members. It is also a good time to engage with Activity groups, who mostly have Convenors there to give information about what they are about and what is happening. At the beginning of the formal meeting, the Business Secretary or Chairperson takes about five minutes to give an update on 'Committee News'. Here, members will learn, for example, of any significant developments in ongoing projects being undertaken by the Committee; they are also informed of any events planned for Belfast u3a or other opportunities to get involved at regional or national level.

As a main focus for these gatherings, David Blair put together a varied and totally fascinating series of talks, which attracted a good audience in each case. The programme for the year was as follows:

29 May: Paul Stewart from the management team of Castle Espie gave a history of the development of the centre and what happens on a day to day basis.

26 June: Carol Ann Creagh talked about 'Angel City', her book of experiences as a trainee nurse in Belfast City Hospital during the 'Troubles', also 'Angels under my Bed' describing her cancer treatment and 'A Short Stretch', her adventures on the Camino de Santiago.

25 September: Eamonn Mallie talked about personalities he met as a political journalist, and described in several books ranging from 'End Game in Ireland' to 'Eyewitness to War and Peace'.

30 October: Trevor Martin presented 'Years of research as a local historian'.

27 November: Philly D'Uva, an Italian chef, talked about her career and cooking in her first book 'Being Me, the recipe of my life'.

29 January: Kelli Hanley, Crime Prevention Officer from the PSNI talked about 'Keeping Safe in 2026; at home and on-line'.

26 March: Dawson Stelfox's talk was 'Friends in High Places', covering his conquest of Mount Everest in 1993 and about helping to develop schools and infrastructure in Nepal.

30 April: Brian Rowan, a BBC correspondent, presented 'A world that has lost its way - telling our story elsewhere'.

Special General Meeting (SGM)

A SGM was called for 26 March, giving 21 days notice, the purpose being to put forward a resolution to lower the quorum for Annual General Meetings and SGMs. Under the current constitution, this is set at 20%. With a current membership of 1230, the quorum requires the presence of 246 members, which is now difficult to achieve with recent growth in number. Having taken advice from the Charity Commission for NI (CCNI) as well as TAT, the Executive Committee stated the intention to change the quorum requirement from 20% to 5%, the most common

quorum in many large u3as. Attendance at the SGM was 217 members, so a quorum was not achieved. The matter will be taken to CCNI.

Member communication

Good communication and engagement with members is at the core of what the Committee tries to achieve on an ongoing basis. The Newsletter, edited by Helen McGlinchey, was published bi-monthly, at the beginning of September and November 2025, January, March and May 2026, giving members a flavour of Committee business, details of previous and upcoming events, and Group activities, often highlighted with photographs.

The Website is an extremely useful resource of information for members, not just relating to Belfast u3a but to the wider context of the NI Regional Executive Committee and, at national level, the Third Age Trust. In recent times, Sean Canning as the new Website Manager has engaged in significant development of what information is displayed and how it is organised. In tandem with this, Sean and members Irene Cauley and David Aspin facilitated a series of IT skills sessions offered to members during the period, November 2025 to February 2026. This course, attended by 60 members, was sponsored by British Telecom and led by Ling Gillespie from AbilityNet. Subsequently, a 'How To' space on the Website was put in place for members to consult about IT matters.

To finish, this special period in Belfast u3a's development has benefited from the hard work and commitment of a solid crew of Committee members working together. Membership has increased significantly to just over 1230 and there are now 70 Activity Groups. New Groups developed this year are Singing for Fun, Guitar, Line Dancing, Ballet for Life, Strength and Balance 1 & 2, Out of the Box and Musical Theatre. With the award of a grant of about £11k from the National Lottery Community Fund received for the period February 2026 - January 2027, a start has been made to address inequalities in lifelong learning in Belfast by diversifying where and what activities are offered.

Barbara McDermott, Business Secretary, on behalf of the Belfast u3a Executive Committee