

**Main Speech by Barbara McDermott Business Secretary at the
25th Anniversary Afternoon at City Hall 26th February 2026**

START

Well, thank you so much Lord Mayor. This is a really big thank you, that's lovely 🙌 🙌
🙌 lovely and thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today, and for your
words, of praise, and encouragement.

So, at the outset I want to say how much we appreciated working with Chrispher Glone
He is a function and exhibition manager that makes events like this possible here in
Belfast City Hall.

And there are numerous people in Belfast u3a to mention, who all contributed to for all
the tribute to what I described at a meeting earlier in the week, getting all our ducks in a
row, which people found quite amusing.

Where did that come from?

We met as an operation team earlier in the week to finalise details That group is headed
up by David Blair, and he's given great support to John McQuillan, who is the event's
coordinator. And John has masterminded this whole show right from the very beginning
as to what you're experiencing today.

So, I'd like you for David and John 🙌 🙌 🙌 . So I am sure you all enjoyed the very
pleasant audio photo presentation, during the drink's reception. That music was a
string quartet by Richard Strauss along with photos of members from the Website Well,
that was all the inspiration and execution of Sean Canning, sitting here at the desk, our
website manager, along with his tech team, and there is more from Sean to come later
today, so thank you very much 🙌 🙌 🙌

And then there's the somewhat important front of the host team, which today
comprised the membership secretary, Mavis Turner, the treasurer John Nicholson,
along with Tess Nicholson, the deputy treasurer Tom Capper along with Zowie Capper ,
the Groups coordinator Geoff Crowther and also Pauline Power who is an ex
chairperson and Bridie Bradley who greeted us all downstairs.

I just hope I have not left anyone out. Forgive me, if I have, all your contributions are
really appreciated 🙌 🙌 🙌 So just a couple of minutes, probably less, because I see
some of my thunder has already been stolen to talk about Belfast u3a, a little bit about
the past, a little bit, maybe more about the present, actually.

So Belfast u3a is one of 25 u3a groups in Northern Ireland, all registered as

individual charities. And we're delighted to have Adrian Brown with us today.

And Adrian is the current chairperson of the Northern Ireland regional Executive Committee, but we're just not local. Belfast u3a is part of a UK wide family with over 1000 local u3as all linked through the Third Age Trust in London, and I'm really pleased to say that Kate Cowen, who is head of Information and Advice at the Third Age Trust, is also here today and sitting close by is Valerie Cobain, who is Northern Ireland's voice on the Third Age Trust Council.

So, Valerie, what a great job you do, and also Kate and Adrian as well for keeping the connection to the larger scheme of things 🙌 🙌 🙌.

So, what about at this point? I'm sure if you cast your mind back 25 years. I'm sure we all can still remember in detail what we were doing around the Millennium Year.

That was in Autumn 2000, and we already referred to Ann, and the Lord Mayor referred to the first meeting in Belfast Castle.

And Ann has already cut the cake, and there are also a number of what I call the first-generation people are also here today and your contribution to the life of the Belfast u3a for a very long time has been invaluable and then on exactly the 28th of February 2001 the Third Age officially welcomed us in .

So this is the certificate, at the moment it normally hangs in an office at home and I spend a lot of time there actually, especially recently, so this is the certificate of membership to certify that Belfast University of the Third Age is a member of the Third Age Trust, and the date is actually in 28th February, 2001. So that is two days to go to the actual anniversary 🙌 🙌 🙌, and so, as it is referred to , we've grown to over 1,200 members and 70 activity groups.

And there almost 80 conveners of those groups who all do a marvellous job and always listening to members and adapting on what's on offer.

There are, at the moment, we've got three new groups in the pipeline. It's really quite exciting times. One is called Ballet for life, and the second is a musical theatre group. And this will bring together the many and varied performing talents in the u3a, and I'm sure it will feature it will feature on the top line at this year's Christmas party later in the year. So just watch out if you join, if you join the Musical Theatre group you will be in the spotlight.

It's not all about dashing about, there is a recognised need for individuals sometimes to take time out to chat in a supportive environment, and what is tentatively called Café Hope is a development and will be especially relevant for those experiencing difficult times around the Bereavement or illness.

So, I'll finish with recognition of our impact on the wider domain and Belfast u3a speaks for older people and pushes for better education and opportunities in the later life.

And we're looking forward to here later after tea from Siobhan Casey, the Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland, about priorities that will guide her work over the coming years.

And as the Lord Mayor said, the Belfast u3a is proud to be part of Age Friendly Belfast and as UNESCO City of learning, Belfast certainly stands out. I think Belfast u3a certainly does to.

And Patricia Magee, she is the Learning city coordinator in Belfast City Council, and I want to thank her very much for getting us involved not long ago in a shared all Ireland event and then also in UNESCO webinar, I think that shows the world the great work that is happening right here in Belfast.

So that's Belfast u3a very much in a nutshell and its 25 years strong and it's still going, so nothing more to say, I just want to say , I'll not hold you back any longer from a cup of tea, some nice food and please also enjoy another presentation from Sean that he has called 'A Northern Irish Musical Portrait' ENJOY 🙌 🙌 🙌

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