

Lord Mayor Cllr Tracy Kelly's Speech at the 25th Anniversary Afternoon at City Hall 26th February 2026

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Thank you so much and I hope Jim is feeling better.

That makes me nice to get to introducing our host here at Belfast City Hall. And it's with great pleasure to join us right off the block. We'll all remember Belfast.

Thanks for choosing me, to speak to you as well. Good afternoon, everyone. It's my absolute pleasure to welcome you all to the city hall today.

And it's fantastic to see the room filled with so many here as we celebrate 25 years of the u3a. So, well done, and I am pleased to see you all here. The cake we just cut is quite spectacular, seems a pity to cut it actually I'm not sure who is was the baker, was there anyone in the room responsible for that No, it's absolutely beautiful. So, we're here today to celebrate with the 25 years of Belfast u3a.

And Belfast u3a is part of a movement, a worldwide movement, that promotes self-lead learning for people who are no longer in the full-time employment. It's moto, live, learn, sorry, learn laugh and live.

It captures the spirit of what the organisation is all about. It empowers people in later life to stay active, to stay connected, stay engaged, through learning, volunteering, social networks. It also plays a vital role in strengthening community actions and supporting well-being, especially for those who may be at risk of isolation or loneliness.

The story of the Belfast u3a began in the autumn of 2000, when an opening gathering was held in Belfast Castle to explore the idea of a forming a local group.

One of the founder members Ann Hayes is with us today, and I want to acknowledge her vision and her commitment from the very beginning.

The first meeting, welcomed just 11 members and soon the activity groups were formed, walking, book club, and out and about.

Full membership of the third age trust followed on the 28th of February 2001, and that milestone is what we're marking today, 25 years later.

Since then, Belfast u3a has grown into a thriving organisation with 1,130 members from all parts of this city. Sixty-five active groups offering an unprecedented range for pursuits.

These groups are the heart of the organisation, and they cover arts, digital skills, languages, storytelling, exercise and social activities.

They are all shaped by the interest and talents of the members, and they help people discover new abilities, build friendships, and stay connected to their own community. The organisation is run entirely by volunteers, including the executive committee of 12 members.

Who give up their time to keep everything running smoothly. The dedication ensures that that the Belfast u3a continues to grow, to evolve, and to respond to the needs of its members. Belfast u3a also plays an important role in the wider, part of our city, and wider life.

It has a strong, public voice on issues affecting people in later life that have continued to contribute directly to the advancement of education for older people. Its outreach support in North and West Belfast, supported by the National Lottery funding its helping to build connections in areas where people face barriers of participation.

This work does not only support new members but enriches the experiences of existing ones by bringing fresh perspectives and new friendships.

The organisation is also closely involved with Age Friendly Belfast, Positive Aging month and volunteers' week, it contributes to Belfast status of UNESCO City of learning, taking part in International webinars, shared Island event and Belfast learning festival and it acts as a bridge, between universities and older volunteers supporting research that helps us better understand an aging community and lifelong learning. Boy are you all of busy? All of this reflects the spirit of the u3a, a belief that the learning is lifelong that community does matter, and later life can be a time of growth, connection and joy. So today is a celebration of 25 years, it's such an achievement, but it is also a really, really good time to have a celebration, and I delighted that you are having it here in City Hall.

I just want to say thank you, to each and every volunteer who gives up their own time and sometimes there is always some people who work in the background to ensure everything runs smoothly, I just want to say thank you to each and every one of you and to the contribution you have made to the City. I hope you all have a fantastic day here in City Hall and hers to the next 25 years, Thank you 🙌 🙌 🙌

I hope you all have a fantastic day here in City Hall and here's to the next 25 years, Thank you 🙌 🙌 🙌

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