



Introduction from Iain Cassidy

Dear Friends,

As the days get longer, I hope you are enjoying getting out in the sunshine with your u3a interest groups. u3a isn't just about learning and skill sharing – for so many, it's a way of discovering community in later life.

This newsletter celebrates that community – with members' stories of the support, friendship and connections they've found through u3a. We're also sharing our new animated film, which highlights how u3a offers connection and purpose in retirement. Tonbridge u3a member Julie's story, at the end of this newsletter, demonstrates this – as she shares how, for her, u3a made a new town feel like home.

Our movement will be joining together at *u3a Festival 26* at the *University of York* in July. We're delighted to announce that Johnny Ball will be opening the Festival. His joyful approach to learning matches the u3a spirit and will be the perfect start to three days of skill sharing and fun.

With very best wishes

Iain Cassidy

CEO of the Third Age Trust

Live later life to the full – a new u3a film

This month, we shared our new animation film, available as a resource for u3as for local promotion.

The film follows someone from retirement, and the complicated emotions that can cause. It then shows them discovering u3a and along with it, community and new interests.



Watch the film on our YouTube channel – youtube.com/@u3a-UK

Making music, mates and memories with u3a

Oswestry u3a's Ozukes band started as an idea between friends and now, three years later, is a successful ukulele band of 40 musicians. The group perform at gigs, with 15 performances planned for 2026. And, while the group predominantly play ukuleles, there's a Cajon drummer, a percussion and bass player in the band too!



Group leader Janet says, "The requirements to join Ozukes are u3a membership, plus enthusiasm and a willingness to try something new. A number of complete novices who learnt to play with Ozukes are now regulars at our gigs."

Janet continues, "Ozukes is a group of friends, bound by a passion for playing our Ukuleles and having fun. We play an eclectic mix of popular music that makes us, and our audiences, smile and feel good."



Woodworking for Wildlife

Southwell u3a's woodwork & chat group have put their skills to good purpose in their local community.

The group, which meets every week, have created a range of boxes for their local park which will serve as homes for small birds, owls, bats and

hedgehogs.

The boxes were handed over to *Fiskerton Friends of the Village Green* this month and they're already being put into place, ready to welcome wildlife this spring.

This year has been exciting for the Council as we have been finding our feet and clarifying our role. In April we say goodbye and thank you to some members who previously served as Trustees on the Board. We will be welcoming new Council Representatives, and all regions except West Midlands will have two Council Representatives.

As the Council's role is to feed back the wishes and needs of the membership to the Third Age Trust, Council Representatives will be out and about in the coming months talking to u3a members and hearing what they have to say

Recently, the Council has been considering Regional Support Teams and their role. One-size does not fit all; some regions don't need one while in others, some well-established teams are charities. The work on this will feed into the Third Age Trust Strategic Plan. The Council is also looking at ways to help small u3as, often in rural areas. We've been working with the Trust to set up training workshops across the regions. Some have already taken place, and more are planned in the coming months.

Task and Finish groups are being set up with specific focuses, such as Recruitment and Retention, a problem for many u3as. As Council Representatives meet u3as, further Task and Finish groups will be set up to help with recurring issues.

The Council is all about two-way conversations with u3as – so please do contact your Council Representative if there's anything you'd like to raise. u3a.org.uk/u3a-council

friends events

Johnny Ball headlines u3a Festival 26

We are delighted to announce that iconic TV legend, Johnny Ball, will be opening u3a Festival 26. Known for his fun approach to learning, Johnny's event will set the scene for three days of joyful skill sharing. With over 35 activities a day, u3a Festival 26 promises to encapsulate the creativity, innovation and excitement of the u3a movement.

Be part of the fun – book your tickets now. u3a.org.uk/festival-2026

Could you lead a sports event at u3a Festival 26?

We're working to create a vibrant and dynamic programme at u3a Festival 26 but, as a member-led event, we need your help to cover a wide range of activities. We are currently looking for volunteers to lead the following sports events:

Walking Football, Tennis, Kurling, Croquet

Please get in touch by emailing festival@u3a.org.uk. Members leading sports events will get free day tickets to the Festival on the day that they are volunteering.



Finding community somewhere new

Tonbridge u3a member Julie shares how u3a helped her to start a new life.



Why did I move to Tonbridge, leaving my comfortable, familiar life of three and a half decades to start again? I knew that walking away from our history, friends, colleagues and students would be difficult. But the impact of widowhood, COVID and a settled family in Tonbridge lured me south from Suffolk.

I knew of u3a and so, in an effort to meet people of my own age and interests, I went to a coffee morning. A friendly welcome, a cuppa and a chat resulted in me being signed up on the day. As a member of the cycling group, country walking group and theatre committee, I met a lot of people quickly. Soon I was invited to events beyond the regular meetings and I began to establish some roots. My connections with people in the town were beginning to form a social life.

I believe it's by being involved actively that you begin to establish a sense of community. You have to go out and make an effort because a new life is very unlikely to drop randomly in to your lap.

Now on the management committee and serving as the theatre for all coordinator, I am grateful for so many wonderful opportunities during the past five years. I've met some extraordinary people, made good friends and I'm now feeling more part of life in Tonbridge.

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Headline photos: Our *Virtual Visits* learning activity asks members to share photos and reports from their museum visits to share with other members; South East London u3a Strolling with a camera group; a still from our new animation film, *Live later life to the full*.