



Learn, laugh, live

Winter 2026 Newsletter

Dear Members,

As we are fast approaching the end of January we are already well into the New Year. I am aware that for some of you, the unwelcome reappearance of covid and seasonal flu made for an uncomfortable end to 2025, but let's hope for a happy and healthy 2026.

Your u3a continues to grow its membership and new groups are being added to the wealth of its activities. Remember, if there is an activity that is not yet represented, you can always start a new group and your committee will provide as much support and assistance as it can. For many of us who lead groups it is very rewarding to meet friends and share their enjoyment over a shared interest. Our Treasurer, Claire, is reporting to you on our recent grant scheme.

We are looking to make some changes to our AGM this year, more of which we will provide in our spring Newsletter, but in this month of new resolutions, let us all try to attend the AGM if at all possible. For those of you who can't, why not try to come to a coffee morning, there will be one in your area.

Best wishes

Julian
Chairman

COFFEE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday February 23rd, 10 to 11.30 at The Posset Cup, Wetherspoon's in Portishead.

Friday March 27th, 2 to 3.30 at the Scotch Horn Leisure Centre in Nailsea.

We are very grateful to any members who can help out at one of these events. If you'd like to help there is always a committee representative there to support you and it's a very good way to meet other member, especially if you're new to the area.

Hope some of you can come along and join us.

Membership news

We have had a sudden surge in members – all those New Year resolutions coming to fruition perhaps? With 17 new members since 1st January, we are now at our highest membership ever, with 567 on our books. A warm welcome to all our new members.

I will be emailing or writing to everyone in mid-March to invite you to renew your membership for 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2027. Please make a note to yourself now – in your diary, on your kitchen calendar, or on your smartphone – just a reminder to check that you have paid by 1st April when your membership will expire. If you think you haven't had your email by late March, please check your spam or junk folder. If you see the email from me in there, please click on it and mark it "Not Spam" then move it to your inbox. That will stop it going to spam in the future as well. I am grateful to everyone for making this an easier process last year, with the majority of people renewing within days of receiving the email. Over 80% of people now pay by bank transfer which is a great help, thank you.

Sarah Hewlett
Membership Secretary

Treasurer's Report

Grants

The Committee is pleased to say that the grant scheme launched in the autumn was a success, with applications for funding totalling in excess of £1000, being approved. The Committee therefore intends to continue the scheme.

If your group could benefit from, for example, some new resources, equipment or perhaps participation in an event, then please contact me for an application form: treasurer.woodspring@icloud.com

Group Update January 2026

Several members have inquired over the last few months about setting up a new group for Woodspring, but many have been hesitant because they're not sure if they'll cope or where they'll begin. I thought it might be very useful if our current group leaders could share their thoughts on how they felt about running a group. I promised anonymity so that everyone would feel free to be very honest! Here are their thoughts:

'After trudging through miles of mud and vegetation, soaked and cold from the freezing rain, it all seems so worthwhile when my fellow birdwatchers sincerely thank me for leading them and helping them to identify that 'little brown job'.

'I really enjoyed setting up the u3a group and I have enjoyed working with you. Thank you again for the help you gave me in the early days and subsequently. Being passionate about my subject, I relished the opportunity to enthuse others. The Group went well – it was actually four groups because of the enormous response. In total, 8 u3a members went on to join the Croquet Club and I hope that some of them have found a new sport for life.'

'I enjoy what other group leaders have arranged so I'm also happy to run a little group and we have no limit for members in my group'

'I am so pleased that I set up the Boules group. It has been a success, and we have had lots of fun. I did it because the other Boules group that I wanted to join was full. I would really encourage others to set up a new interest group. It's straightforward and I'm happy to share any tips'

'It was a good day when I decided to offer Bridge for Beginners (now Improvers) through U3A, no regrets ever. The group have all become friends, who meet frequently for practice and socialising between lessons. Such a lovely bunch. Guiding them has only ever been a pleasure, with plenty of laughs in the mix.'

'For me, it's an opportunity to enjoy a social group of likeminded people based on my topics of interest.'

'It's such a treat sharing an outing with a group of lovely people who are there to enjoy themselves. This year's visits won't start until well into Spring possibly early Summer - I haven't had time to write it yet but it will happen. There is always room in the group for new people and ideas for future visits from group members are always welcome.'

'Getting feedback from a group member that they enjoyed the session and learnt something new!'

'Now it's all set up then it's a quick email once a fortnight to confirm numbers and then over 30 people can have a very enjoyable afternoon, and they are very appreciative and friendly'

'It gives the Knitting for Charity group a lot of pleasure knowing that they are supporting Southmead's baby unit, the Avon fire service and Weston hospice with their efforts.'

'Although previously having been leader of a mainstream u3a group I was reticent about starting a new group with a "niche" subject but was pleasantly surprised by how members took to it and helped with the setting-up.'

'I enjoy leading the table tennis group as I get to meet new people and give something back to the U3A.'

'I enjoy leading the Greek conversation group, as we struggled to find a Greek group and it is nice to tailor the group to what we are looking for.'

'Sometimes I have found being a group leader frustrating and challenging but overwhelmingly I find it rewarding and I know my efforts are appreciated by the majority of Members. I am always rewarded when I see how the friendship and companionship of belonging to a group of like-minded people brings happiness to an individual.'

'It's very rewarding to see everyone enjoying a meal in good company and catching up on their news- especially their holiday exploits.'

'Although wary when I decided to set up the group I found potential members were never critical or complaining, they were all helpful and supportive, wanting it to be a success. In no way has it been a chore.'

'I enjoy being the leader of the Recorder group because everyone contributes to the fun and appreciates what I do.'

'I love seeing how much people enjoy coming to the group'

'Book Bugs reading group is still reading! We move venues each month which makes us more available and reachable'

'I enjoy being group leader meeting new people and bringing a bit of competitive fun into their lives. It's also a good place to have a natter with like-minded friends.'

'My role as group leader is made all the more enjoyable by the sociable and enthusiastic approach to our subject by all of our group'.

'I enjoy running the Portishead and Nailsea U3A Astronomy groups. The organisation is simple; I just make sure the rooms are booked, then turn up and discuss topical events in Astronomy and space. It is a dynamic subject, and the images we see are always stunning. The Portishead group has been running for many years. I started the Nailsea group from scratch, and we now have a good-sized group of enthusiastic members.

U3A Astronomy - Portishead & Nailsea.

We meet once a month for 10 months a year (excluding summer and Christmas). We meet late morning - but I have access to a telescope in Australia, where we can see stars and galaxies and a telescope on Tenerife - for observing the Sun - with live views (weather dependent) We also were just awarded a grant, so I have purchased a ZWO S30 Pro Smart telescope for use by our U3A Members - fill in a loan agreement form and you can borrow the Telescope to do you own observations using your smart phone and the S30 Telescope.

We meet in Portishead on the 4th Wednesday of the Month at 11 am at the Folk Hall. We meet in Nailsea on the Thursday after the 4th Wednesday of the Month at 10:30 am at #65, the High Street.'

'I enjoy coordinating the U3A walking group because it gets people out in the fresh air and it is good for our well-being.'

'Running a U3A group has pleasures & (small) irritations as has any activity. I enjoy pursuing a long term interest with like-minded people. I find people appreciative of my efforts & very forgiving of any mistakes & I greatly enjoy the time we spend together.

I suppose my main irritation is the member who has very poor attendance thus holding a place when we have a waiting list. I find we have our long term stalwarts but also some change as people have different demands on & wishes for their lives'.

I've been running the Opera group with much satisfaction for many years. My only regret is that men don't seem so keen to join - I'm happy for anyone to come and join us for a session, see how enjoyable it is! My wife and I also took over running a Sunday lunch group, and again, no men - any takers?'

'What makes U3A special is the sharing of ideas and knowledge in the groups. Being a group leader makes this possible - this can occasionally be challenging, but it is extremely rewarding.'

'I moved to Nailsea 4 years ago to be near children and grandchildren. I had run a singing group with the Skipton U3A, and as there was nothing similar, decided to set one up here.

New to the area, and not knowing any older people, where do I start? I am really indebted to Chriss, who made life so much easier with suggestions of venues, advertising the group etc. This was so lovely, from knowing nobody, there were suddenly 20+ people in the group.

Using the Beacon platform, which actually is so easy, I can send out programmes and other emails so incredibly easily - I am no techy!!

I have now started a Pickleball group which, with 70 members is now full! So from knowing no older people I now know so many lovely people, many of whom are real friends. I would urge anyone with an interest to share, to start a group. It is relatively easy, you are given so much support, and you meet so many interesting and lovely people.

Among others, the Astronomy Groups, Historical Reading, Curzon Cinema Group and Garden Visits have vacancies, as does:

Discovering Interesting Women. We meet in the morning on the 4th Tuesday of the month and look at the lives of different women who we may or may not have heard of before. Lots of surprises. Anyone interested can contact me for further details on 07900 964496 or j.m.day@talk21.com

And a potential new group:

Occasional Brunch and Lunch Group.

By occasional I mean very occasional.

3 or possibly 4 meetings a year.

Venues would vary.

Different days of the week.

Often at short notice.

Please let me know if you are interested by replying to Joan anderjmm92@gmail.com

Regards
Chriss Pickles