



Belfast University of the Third Age
Trustee Annual Report for the year
1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Reference and Administrative Information

Name of the Charity

The name of the Charity is the Belfast University of the Third Age

Other names by which the Charity is known

Belfast U3A

Registered Charity Number

NIC101362

Address of the principal office of the Charity

c/o Treasurer Belfast U3A, 77 Onslow Parade, Belfast BT6 0AS

Names of Trustees (31 March 2024)

Jim McDonnell

Barbara McDermott

Margaret Stirrup

Jim Livingstone

John McQuillan

Helen McGlinchey

Neil McQuillan

David Blair

Geoff Crowther

Tom Capper

Patsy Torney

Structure Governance and Management

The governing document of the Charity is its Constitution as adopted at the Annual General Meeting 30 April 2015. The Trustees are the members of the Executive Committee, elected by the membership at the Annual General Meetings (or occasionally co-opted).

The Charity is affiliated to the Third Age Trust (Charity No: 288007), the co-ordinating body for u3a groups within the UK.

Objectives and Activities, Achievements and Performance

Belfast u3a is devoted to its commitment as set out in Article 2.1.1 of its Constitution i.e. 'Advance the education of the public and in particular, the education of the middle aged and older people in Belfast who are not in full time gainful employment'.

The activities undertaken during the year as outlined in reports below are evidence of that continuing commitment.

Financial Review: See Accounts and Treasurer's Report for 12 months ending 31st March 2024

These have been approved by the charity's independent examiner. (See separate reports)

Committee activities

All of the business of the charity was fully completed throughout the year, including the preparation and submission of all the necessary reports for the 22nd AGM (held in April 2023) and for the Charity Commission for NI (CCNI). Accounts and reports and other information relating to the AGM were placed on the Website of the Belfast U3A.

It was agreed at our June 2023 meeting to schedule future meetings on a bimonthly basis starting in September 2023 as well as scheduling a Planning meeting to develop strategic priorities for the future.

We were pleased to run the monthly meeting for all members (with a speaker) throughout the year at the Balmoral Hotel and to hold meetings with the Convenors of our interest groups in April 2024, and with New Members in October 2023. We also organised an event in September 2023 to celebrate the U3A movement and attracted almost 100 people. In addition, a wonderful Christmas Party was organised in Shorts Social Club with food and entertainment in December 2023. Again 100 of our members joined in the festivities, welcoming the opportunity to meet their friends in the Christmas Season.

As our membership continues to grow, committee members continue to increase their commitment to keeping up with administrative and digital developments. We are delighted to welcome new committee members each year.

Strategically, the Executive Committee has identified some key priorities for future development which are focused on (a) enhancing accessibility to Group activities and other events by members with a disability, (b) strengthening our marketing capability to ensure optimum membership for people living in all parts of the city of Belfast, and (c) building greater support and sustainability for the Executive Committee to fulfil its administrative and management functions. Work is now in progress to achieve these objectives over the next year and beyond.

Membership

We are delighted to report that our membership numbers have continued to increase in the past year. We now have 1,020 members as of March 2024. Our membership is now some 30% larger than it was pre-pandemic. We are pleased to say that we have welcomed 401 new members since April 2021. So, Belfast u3a continues to thrive and grow significantly. While many of our members have been with us for some time, we welcome new members, all of whom have new skills and interests which they are willing to share with other members.

The Newsletter (which is bi-monthly) was sent by email or post to all members. With 97% of our members accessible by email, this means that most of our members are digitally included. Printed copies are posted to members not accessible by email. Other methods of communication now include frequent emails to individual members through our Beacon (membership management) system, introduced in January 2020, regular activity news updates on our website and some news entries on the social media outlets run by the Third Age Trust.

The annual membership subscription was reviewed (in terms of methods of payment and size of the subscription) for the coming year and decisions were made by the Executive Committee aimed at ensuring the charity remains adequately funded and has sufficient reserves. As a consequence, there will be no change in the membership fee for the coming year.

Interest Groups and Activities

In keeping with the u3a movement, our 65 Interest Groups remain the lifeblood of Belfast u3a and each year new groups emanate from the membership based on requests and on the knowledge and skills of members themselves. Activities include, but are not confined to, reading/literature, walking, cycling, bowling, golf, language learning, bridge, photography, Pilates, art appreciation, creative writing, music, wine tasting, gardening and discussion

groups. New groups established in the past year include pickleball, a new creative writing group, a ukulele group, a myths & legends group and a folk singing group.

Annual meetings with Convenors have continued and have been well attended and welcomed by Convenors. The executive committee appreciates these special members who give so much of their time, skill and energy to leading activities and discussions on a regular basis. Activities may have slowed a little during the COVID pandemic years, but they are generally now back thankfully to face-to-face meetings.

With Group venues now open and free of previous constraints, we are now meeting physically to enjoy all of our activities and discussions, as social mixing is an essential part of the u3a ethos. This also counteracts social isolation, encourages learning, and supports mental and physical health, essential for all ages certainly, but especially so in an organisation like ours, with a membership of third agers.

Monthly Meetings of Members

These meetings, with a range of guest speakers, to which all members are invited, were held very successfully at the Balmoral Hotel throughout the year, with more members joining us each month, the typical attendance being up to 160 members. The speakers provided stimulating talks on a wide range of topics which were an excellent mixture of culture, entertainment and education.

Concluding remarks

In the context of recent years being dominated by the global COVID pandemic, we are delighted to say that Belfast u3a now operates in more normal times. But, it continues to change with the times, with members learning new skills and knowledge, as well as exploring new opportunities for living a full and active life in the 'third age'.

Jim Livingstone, Chairperson, on behalf of the Trustees of Belfast U3A.