Chair's Report 2025-2026

Dear Members,

As we come to the close of another vibrant year, I am delighted to share our achievements, challenges, and plans. This has been a particularly rewarding year with several projects that were in development now coming to fruition, and it has been a pleasure to play a part in these achievements.

Membership - Our membership has grown to 821 this year as ever, in the safe hands of our Membership Secretary, Sandy Stephens and helpers.

It has been heartening to see so many fresh faces joining our groups, bringing new skills, ideas, and enthusiasm.

Treasury - Our Treasurer of recent years expressed a wish to retire at the end of 2025, and we were fortunate to secure the services of not one but two new accounting experts. Our two highly qualified and capable Treasurers, give each the reassurance that they can take well-earned, stress-free holidays.

Groups - Our groups remain the absolute mainstay of our u3a. We encourage members to continue to expand these so that there are opportunities for all members, and the programme remains fresh and appealing to both existing and new members.

Ideally, we should have one group for every ten members, and we are a little short of this.

If you have an idea for a new group, do contact grpscoord@petersfieldu3a.org.uk, and you will receive full support both through the Groups Support Team and Hubs to get it started.

Louise Fox will continue as Groups Coordinator until the end of December 2026. Jackie Butcher and Pat Birch will then take the work forward, with support from a Management Committee member.

Grants Scheme - A subcommittee of two Management Committee members took on the task of developing a grant scheme that would benefit our groups and members while meeting the many requirements governing the use of our surplus funds.

They produced a robust, fair and practical scheme that can also serve as a template for future grant programmes.

The scheme also benefited from strong collaboration with the Interest Hubs, whose input helped ensure that the scheme reflected the needs and ideas of members across our u3a.

The first grants have already been awarded, and groups have begun to use the grants for varied activities and developments.

Doreen Challen will be telling us about that later.

IT - Our strong team of three, Tim, Russ and Mike, are helping us move forward confidently with new, time-saving technology. The team's remit includes the complete renewal of our accounting system, the formatting of our website, management of our database, and support with a wide range of technical matters. We would welcome additional members, so please speak to Tim Willans Tim.Willans@petersfieldu3a.org.uk) or Suzie Reynolds if you may be able to help.

Hubs (originally called Listening Groups) - Recognising the need for better, regular two-way communication, we continued to develop the Hubs. Establishing them has required considerable effort, but the Hub Co-ordinators' perseverance is paying off: communication has improved, and there is now a stronger two-way flow of ideas and member feed-back. We're very grateful to all the Hub Co-Ordinators for their time and effort including Jenny Stevinson, Kate Napier, Lindsey McBarron, Peter Clist, and Peter Lake

Jenny Stevinson will give a brief presentation.

Monthly General Meeting and Other Open Meetings

We now have a capable team that sets up each General Monthly Meeting and provides refreshments, supporting the excellent work of our Speaker Secretary: Titian Fleming.

Our thanks go to the teams running Health Matters, Arts and Heritage, Science and Technology for all the sterling work they do. We are so fortunate to have four Monthly Meetings open to all.

Audio-Visual Team - Following a successful recruitment drive, members have come forward to strengthen the Audio-Visual Team. They have received training and clear guidance from our valued Audio-Visual Lead, Paul Tracey. Their work is vital to the smooth and professional delivery of our meetings, and we have purchased new equipment to give the team the practical support it needs.

Connect - Lyn, Steve and Joce now produce Connect fortnightly, taking over from Liz Wright, an early pioneer of the 'New Connect'. Liz stepped down after refreshing its format and producing it single-handedly. Thank you, Liz, for your important contribution and for helping the new team settle in.

Welcome Team - The Welcome Team continues to help new members feel at home. Newcomers receive a personal welcome and are invited to our successful bi-monthly coffee morning, where support is available to help them identify suitable groups and become confident with our website and IT. Members may also receive a follow-up phone call around six months after joining, and a bi-monthly lunch provides another opportunity to meet others.

Recruitment - We now have a dedicated member who follows up our vacancies and seeks the right person for each role. This has proved extremely helpful and has enabled us to move forward with many of the projects described above.

Volunteering is vital to the continued success of our organisation, but it does not have to involve a major commitment: even a small amount of time or help with a specific task can make a real difference. It can also be a very rewarding way to share your skills, meet other members and contribute to the friendly community at the heart of our u3a.

Suzie Reynolds will give a vote of thanks

Plans for the next Year - We will be offering a First Aid course aimed predominantly at the activity groups.

We hope to repeat the Grants Scheme, when we have been able to fully evaluate the lessons learned from our pilot scheme.

We are aware that we need to keep our website updated and would welcome help from our membership with this. Our new Chair will be adding their own ideas too.

Final thanks

I would like to thank our Secretarial Team, Rose Noonan, Doreen Challen and Suzie Reynolds for keeping me well informed and ensuring that our u3a remains compliant. I am also deeply grateful to my two Vice Chairs, who carried additional responsibilities as officers of the Committee: Bernice O'Reilly as Groups Lead and Rose as Secretary.

Fortunately, we have a full complement of multi-talented and focused Management Committee members. Together, we have been able to turn ideas into action in a happy, constructive and collaborative atmosphere. My thanks to them all for their support.

Bernice O'Reilly, recently stepped down and will be greatly missed; we sincerely thank her for her hard work, guidance and commitment over the past two years.

Thanks too, to all of you who have encouraged a willing and giving atmosphere for our u3a.

In summary, this has been a positive and enjoyable year in which to serve as Chair. I am delighted to hand over to our new Chair and team and wish them every success as they lead us into another year of embracing the u3a motto: LEARN, LAUGH and LIVE

Jenny Thwaites

November 2026