

Chair's Report for the AGM, April 2025 to March 2026

Chair's Introduction

The past year has been both frustrating and challenging, not least because we have been confronted by the diminished number of Committee members available to share the workload. Nevertheless, the proposed introduction of a revised structure, has encouraged more members to come on board and ensure South Solihull u3a will continue to thrive.

This report reflects on our achievements, acknowledges the difficulties we have faced, and looks ahead to the opportunities that the coming year may bring.

Membership

During the year we welcomed 21 new full members and 6 associate members, bringing our total membership as at 31st March 2026 to 200 full members and 15 associates.

This year we have also introduced 'affiliate members' who are members from another u3a who have joined us, by invitation, to help maintain the financial viability of the Learn, Laugh, Move Exercise Group.

During the year, the Membership Secretary has continued to produce the popular "Weekly Update" to promote and communicate certain interest groups and u3a business.

Regrettably, it has not been possible to have a "New Members Meeting" in the last year, primarily because of the extra u3a workload of the Membership Secretary. This will change in the coming year, and the New Member Meetings will re-commence. The intention, as before, will be to encourage new members to engage fully and take up some of the roles that they can play and the activities they can enjoy.

Special mention is needed to record the encouragement and enthusiasm shown by a good number of members who responded to the request for more to get involved in the organisation of our u3a. The coming year will see a much wider and diverse input into how our u3a will organise itself.

Social Activities

Two of our regular annual activities –the Crazy Golf Challenge and the First Aid & Resuscitation Training - have taken place as usual, both being well-received by those taking part. And a new activity that a number of members tried in the last year, was a taster session of archery at the Meriden Archery Club.

We anticipate more social events taking place in the coming year, now that we are to have a Social Activities Lead.

Core Meetings

We have continued to have a wide variety of interesting topics at our monthly core meetings. There have been talks on The National Gardens Scheme, Vintage Garden Tools, Visually Impaired People going to Everest, The Role of Medical Detection Dogs, Wonders of The Silk Routes, the Midlands Air Ambulance Service and HS2 Construction. In addition, Age UK Solihull gave advice on Later Life; our local MP gave us a short talk about local issues followed by a Q & A session, and we had musical entertainment by way of songs from the last century.

However, by far, the highlight of the Core Meetings was the Christmas Pantomime, 'Sleeping Beauty', when the hall was filled to capacity with a hugely appreciative audience (Oh yes it was!).

Thanks to Rosemary and Richard for organising these monthly meetings on our behalf..

Refreshments & Facilities

Members contribute significantly to the success of Core Meetings by helping with refreshments, moving chairs and setting up equipment. We thank all volunteers who manage these operations throughout the year.

In partnership with the hall's management, we have continued our project to improve facilities at the BHCC. The loudspeakers and the amplifier are now permanently installed, avoiding the heavy work needed to deploy them for each Core Meeting. We have further improvements in mind, including a permanent ceiling-mounted projector.

Interest Groups

We now have 28 active Interest groups within South Solihull u3a. Notable changes and events during the year have been ...

Sewing

Helen Clarke set up this new creative group last summer, and now has over 20 members, who bring along their ideas and sewing machines.

Philosophy 4

Since September, our new Philosophy group has followed in the footsteps of those already run by Richard Batchelor and Sheila Campbell, providing the opportunity for members to learn about the topic and the great Philosophers who contributed to human knowledge and culture. David Sykes leads the group.

Co-ordinators Meetings

The Group Co-ordinators now meet twice per year, providing the opportunity for the Committee to thank them for the work that they do, meet each other, share concerns and advice and exchange information about each other's activities.

Statistics

For the first time, we collected information from the Interest Group Co-ordinators to produce some statistics on Group membership. These showed that the Groups had an average of 17 members, but also that around 10% of ssu3a members don't participate in any of the Groups. In consideration of that latter statistic, the Group Co-ordinators now take turns to describe the activities and purpose of their Group at each Core Meeting.

Finance

Another year of prudent management ensured that our membership fees remained the same as previous years.

I.T. systems

Thanks to our Technical Team, Terry Powderhill and Dave Willis, we are making growing use of I.T. to support and promote our members and offerings.

Website

Following the successful conversion of our website to the National u3a “SiteWorks” platform last year, we have continued to develop it. Over the year the number of Interest Groups making full use of the website has grown from 12 to 21. We still think ours is the best website in the Cluster for promoting our extensive and diverse programme of activities, and indeed many of our recent recruits have made first contact with us through the website.

Beacon

This year we started to use the “Groups” functionality of our Beacon Management System to track Interest Group membership. Already about 30% of the Group Coordinators are using the system, and we expect the number to grow in the coming year.

Your Committee Members and Group Coordinators.

The Committee members who are standing down, after several years of service:

John Bennett – our Treasurer since 2023,

Terry Powderhill – our long-standing webmaster, who will continue to ensure the operation of our website and the Beacon system as a member of our new Support Group.

Conclusion

Thanks to the commitment, goodwill, and determination of our members, the spirit of learning and friendship that defines our community has continued.

The contribution of our volunteers has been especially vital; their generosity of time and energy has enabled us to keep moving forward, even in demanding circumstances.

Malcolm Clark
Chair, South Solihull u3a

Approved at AGM, 11th May 2026