

CHAIR REPORT FOR 2026 AGM

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the 23rd Annual General Meeting of A&Ou3a.

First of all, I would like to thank all those who have been involved in the organisation of this meeting. We decided some time ago to return to the Ministry Centre, mainly to give us more space and to facilitate counting of attendees, which can be difficult at HQ with everyone coming and going at the same time. A great deal of planning takes place in the weeks and months leading up to an AGM, and more so this year with the introduction of proxy voting. Special recognition must go to Sheila Kierans, Liz Dixon and Alan Nolan, whose combined knowledge and expertise have enabled us to offer proxy voting by post and online for the very first time. 58 members have taken advantage of this, and it has also enabled us to exceed the quorum by a good margin.

Our u3a continues to thrive, with over 1700 Members at present, and over 70 interest groups. Our Group Leaders work tirelessly to provide members with a good experience at each meeting, collecting and paying in money and dealing with problems appropriately as they arise. Some of our group leaders have served in that capacity for very many years, and thanks must go to them for their dedication and commitment. One such person is Margaret Gibbon, who led the Local History Group for 17 years before retiring a few weeks ago. I'm happy to say that Ann Hedges immediately volunteered to step in, so Local History meetings were able to continue without a break. Ann Robinson has also decided to step down after 10 years of expertly organising visits to concerts at Liverpool Philharmonic, and unless this group is to close, we need a volunteer to take over. Thanks must also go to Group Support, under the leadership of Ian Grant, who provide assistance and advice to group leaders and others, whenever the need arises.

We have a number of Art and Craft groups which are very well attended, and whose talented members produce beautiful artwork. On Saturday 24th October we will be holding an Art & Craft Showcase at Aughton Village Hall, where you will be able to view and purchase items, and watch as members demonstrate their crafts. There will be performances by some of our music groups, plus of course tea, coffee, soft drinks and delicious home made cakes. We hope to see as many of you as possible there.

Our Social Committee continues to work hard in order to offer our members several social events during the year, and we look forward to the Barn Dance very soon, then the Choir's Summer Concert, the Quiz Night and of course the Christmas Social. Again, a great deal of planning goes into the organisation of these events, and we are hugely grateful to Paul Andrews, Mike Rimmer and all those who make them possible. Paul is stepping down as Chair of our Social Committee, and Mike will be taking over, with Liz Dixon taking on the role of Chair of Communications. With such capable and dedicated members at the helm, any interruption to your current service is very unlikely! And speaking of entertainment, both the Drama and Musical Theatre groups are planning events in October and November, and Theatre visits will continue to be organised by Judy Kirkham, so keep a look out for details in all the usual places.

Our finances are very ably and professionally managed by Derrick Fewings, John Tomlinson and Deirdre Slater. The importance of this work cannot be underestimated, and we are very grateful for the constant monitoring of our finances by such capable people. Derrick will be going into more detail on this subject very shortly.

Your Management Committee meets four times a year, but of course business is being discussed all the time via email and personal contact. I am deeply grateful to all Committee members for offering their expertise and ongoing support in what can sometimes be difficult situations. This year Paul Andrews is retiring after 9 years on the MC, and I for one will miss his contribution to our discussions. However, he assures me that he isn't going anywhere and will continue to do all the jobs he does so well. Thank you Paul. Paul's resignation brings the Management Committee numbers down to 10, but we have 3 ladies who are seeking nomination: Alison Higham, Jane Ellison and Caroline Donaldson, and you will be able to vote for them shortly.

Technology plays an enormous part in our activities, and I'm sure I'm not the only baby-boomer here who couldn't possibly manage without her phone, laptop and smart watch! We are very fortunate to have a number of members who are very proficient in this area, in particular our Web team, Willem Weichers, Alan and Joyce Nolan and Maureen Boumphrey, as well as a number of Group Leaders who between them keep our website up to date and offer IT support to those who need it, as do Bill Soens and Alan Starkie, with Bill also looking after our Facebook presence.

This time last year I mentioned that Liz Dixon and Deirdre Slater had been hard at work revising and updating our policies. I am pleased to say that huge task is now complete, and those policies are now available on our website for you all to refer to. We also now have in place a review process, which means that those policies will be regularly examined and updated if necessary. Thank you Liz and Deirdre.

Communication with our members is an important aspect of our organisation, and the Comms team meet regularly to discuss the various channels we currently use, such as the website, magazine, Horizons notices and slideshow, and monthly enews. Ann Hedges has recently joined the team, bringing with her new ideas, and as already mentioned, Liz Dixon now leads the team.

It's easy to take for granted the fact that when we turn up at Horizons every week the chairs and tables will be ready, the kettle will be on Linda and Bill will have the bookstall ready, Susan will have her cards displayed, and everything will be as it should be. Of course it doesn't all happen by chance, and we are indebted to all those who arrange the furniture, provide refreshments and man (or woman) the Welcome Desk every week. Thank you all, we really appreciate all you do. Once a month we have our Speaker Meetings, and huge thanks must go to Shirley Kirby, who is doing a magnificent job organising speakers, and who I believe has a full programme ready for us for next year.

We continue to encourage community involvement, and in the past year our Guitar Group have performed for the residents of Aughton Park Care Home, whilst the

Recorder Group paid a visit to High Wray Care Home and entertained the residents there, including one of our Founder members, Alex McMinn. We are hoping to take part in the Gingerbread Festival on the 12th July, and the Art & Craft showcase mentioned earlier will be advertised locally and open to the public.

In March this year we held the 7th First Aid course, which means that so far we have trained over 120 people in emergency First Aid techniques, representing over 60% of groups. My ultimate aim is to have at least one person in every group who has done the course, knows how to use a defibrillator and administer CPR. More dates are in place for the Autumn, so keep an eye on emails etc if you would like to take advantage of this very worthwhile opportunity.

We continue to maintain links with other organisations, and earlier this year Ann Roberts and I had very productive talks with Rev Ian Greenwood and Diane Prosesey regarding parking arrangements, with mutually acceptable results. We have an excellent relationship with the 9th Ormskirk Scouts & Guides, and were pleased to be able to contribute to the new front door to HQ, part of an ongoing programme of improved security. Our collaboration with Edge Hill continues, with the popular Ageing Better workshops organised by Julia Bate providing interest and information for both our organisations.

If I've missed anyone out, I apologise. I'm aware that a great many people are quietly going about their business without expecting recognition of any kind. The u3a is run by its members, for its members, and I think we do that extremely well. Thank you all for making the effort to be here today, I really do appreciate it. The coming year (my last as Chair incidentally) will no doubt have its challenges and successes as always, but will continue to provide opportunities for our members to enjoy a huge variety of activities in a friendly environment, and to Learn, Laugh and Live.

Thank you.

Pamela Ball
June 2026