



## NORTHERN IRELAND REGION NEWS AUGUST 2009

This is my second report as Northern Ireland Trustee on the National Executive Committee of The Third Age Trust (soon possibly to be renamed U3A UK). However, I am about to go back to paid work and the Trustee role is likely to be taken on by Mavis Turner from Belfast U3A who I am sure will serve the region well and, hopefully, enjoy the job as much as I have.

### News from the Third Age Trust

#### Development

The stated aims of U3As are:

- *To encourage and enable older people no longer in full-time paid employment to help each other to share their knowledge, skills, interests and experience.*
- *To demonstrate the benefits and enjoyment to be gained and the new horizons to be discovered in learning throughout life.*
- *To celebrate the capabilities and potential of older people and their value to society.*
- *To make U3As accessible to all older people.*
- *To encourage the establishment of U3As in every part of the country where conditions are suitable and to support and collaborate with them.*

Over 225,000 people in the UK are members of around 730 U3As, but that involves less than 2% of the population over retirement age. Clearly not everyone wants to be a member but how many people have never heard of U3As?

Despite having over 3,400 members in 15 U3As, Northern Ireland is, after Scotland, the second most sparse area (1.1% of retirees) and there are many retired people who have never heard of and do not have ready access to a U3A.

Over the coming year the Trust plans an enhanced information campaign to highlight the benefits to the health and wellbeing of older people through participating in life-long learning, provided at little or no cost by U3As. With likely cut backs in funding for other adult education, the U3A method provides a “win-win” situation.

As part of the publicity campaign the Trust will be setting up a system to gather together news bulletins for individual U3As, to provide help to editors if asked, and to ensure that the achievements reported in the bulletins are publically recognised. You will be asked for help with this during the coming year.

#### Action:

- **Spread the word about the benefits of U3A membership and encourage friends to start a new one.**
- **U3A pin badges can open up conversations about the U3A. They are available for £1 each from [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk) or from your U3A.**

## **Informal Adult Learning**

In England the (now-defunct) Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS) produced a White Paper on informal adult learning, called "The Learning Revolution" which you may have read about in the Spring "U3A News". For U3As the key point of this is the recognition given to the benefits, at relatively little cost to Government, from supporting informal learning groups. It recognises the health benefits from keeping active, mentally and physically.

The Education Sub-Committee in Northern Ireland proposes making representation at Stormont to ensure that the Department of Education and Learning (DEL) is aware of the research done by DIUS and is reminded of its earlier commitment to make premises available to U3As when not otherwise in use.

**Action: Let the Education Sub-Committee know of any successes or failures in negotiating with schools or colleges.**

## **Survey of U3A Membership**

After Easter some of you will have been asked to participate in a survey of U3A members, to find out who you are, how the demography of membership has changed, the extent of your involvement with U3As and how you use the services provided by the Third Age Trust. The results of this survey are now available on both the Trust's website and that of the Northern Ireland Region.

The next stage in the process will involve those who volunteered being asked for their opinions and suggestions on what the Trust could do better.

## **News from the Northern Ireland Region**

### **Current membership**

There are now 15 U3As in Northern Ireland with a membership of 3,400. Congratulations to Upper Bann, the latest recruit whose temporary membership was finalised in June.

### **New Regional Posts**

The constitution of the regional committee required office holders to step down after a term of office of three years and consequently the Executive experienced a complete change at the AGM held in Cushendall on 29<sup>th</sup> April. Congratulations to the new members who are:



*Mary Dynan*  
(Newry)  
Chairman



*Sandra Foster*  
(Belfast)  
Secretary

*Mary McFadden*  
(Glens)  
Vice-Chairman

In Absentia: Leonard Coote (*Causeway*) Treasurer

In addition Gabrielle Deans has expressed a wish to step down from the role as Education Development Contact at the end of this or next year and Sheila Magee is returning to work and regrets that she will no longer be able to act as Regional Trustee. The work of both these posts is funded by the Third Age Trust (travel, subsistence and home-office expenses) and involves attending interesting events and meeting a wide range of fantastic people. Anyone interested in the EDC post should contact Gabrielle.



Mavis Turner from Belfast agreed to be nominated for the post of Regional Trustee (the only nomination) and NI U3As have been asked to vote for the appointment.

Mavis, Ann (past trustee) and Sheila (current trustee)

### **Communication Day, Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

A special event is being organised for Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> October when up to 8 members from each U3A will be invited to a special “Communication Day” in Belfast Metropolitan College. We all know what goes on in our own U3A but probably not much at what others do, so we can benefit from picking up ideas from each other and sharing good experience.

In the morning it is hoped that Lin Jonas and Terry Hardy from the Third Age Trust will give an overview of what the U3A ethos is all about, answer your questions about topics such as the resources you can access and what insurance cover is provided, and listen to your idea about help or services you would like to get.

The NI Education Sub-Committee will take over in the afternoon when the meeting will split into discussion groups to share experiences and learn about what others do. You will have the opportunity to talk to members of other U3As and to tell what works for you and learn about what you could do.

Invitations will be sent out in September. The day is being funded by the Third Age Trust as part of a policy to improve communications between it and the regions and it is hoped that the opportunity will be fully taken up. The college is directly opposite the bus/train station so there will be every opportunity to use Travel Passes. The college houses Catering training so the lunches (paid by the Third age Trust) should be good.

### **Glens & Dalriada Study Day**

On 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> April, Glens & Dalriada held a vastly successful regional event in Cushendall to which all U3As were invited and which centred on presenting aspects of the culture of the Glens. After the Regional AGM in the morning, the study event began with options of a walk or talk about the area, then dinner and entertainment. On the second day there was a range of workshops for participants to take part in.

**Action: Other U3As to consider showing off their area.**

### **North Down & Ards Study Day**

On Tuesday June 16<sup>th</sup> North Down & Ards held their second study day on “Our Cultural Heritage” at Oxford Island. This time they were entertained and informed by two National U3A figures, Ian Searle, NEC Vice-chair, and Stella Porter, National Storytelling Subject Co-ordinator, together with local talent, Jim Hunter from Causeway, Evelyn Donaldson from North Down & Ards and Art O’Dalaigh, story teller from Dungannon U3A. Music was provided by the McCleans from Bangor.

### **News from the Northern Ireland U3As**

#### **Newry U3A moves house**

Newry U3A moved to new premises over the Christmas break and reopened on Monday 19th January 2009 in The Abbey Yard (028 3026 6034).

#### **Funding opportunities**

The Trustee from Scotland pointed out to me an EU funding programme called Older People for Older People ([www.o4os.eu](http://www.o4os.eu)) which helps older people to help other older people in the periphery areas of the EU, specifically targeting Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless, U3As in Northern Ireland have been doing very well. Newry received £2000 from Lloyds T.S.B to run two courses, “Health and Well Being” and “Cooking for the Credit Crunch”. Ulster Bank provided them with funding for Boccia and New Age Kurling equipment and the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland provided £600 for Yoga. Downe received nearly £400 for a PA system from Down District Council.

On a much larger scale Foyle has been looking for ways of improving the services it provides to its members and has drawn up a proposition known as “The Transformation Project”. It has made contact with Sports NI from which body it is hopeful of obtaining half a million. Also Foyle has applied to Arts Council NI for funding to enable them to enlarge their Art Room and improve the library, music room and kitchen. Foyle has also obtained smaller grants which will help them run courses on health issues.

Causeway U3A has successfully applied both this year and last year to Coleraine Borough Council for grants. In June 2009 they were notified that 2 grants of nearly £1,000 each would be given to reduce fees associated with tutored classes and group running costs.

*Sheila Magee, Northern Ireland Trustee, August 2009*