

Dawlish & District u3a

Annual General Meeting, 21st September 2026

Chair's Report

This is the sixth report I have given to the AGM as Chair. I'd like to pay tribute to all members who have served on the committee in the years I have been Chair. As I hope you all appreciate, running an organisation like the u3a is very much about team work. They have all made a contribution, and been generous with their time.

There are also others who prefer not to serve on the committee, but nonetheless wish to make a contribution. In particular, Miggie and Dave Pickton created our excellent website and have managed it with remarkable efficiency and skill for the past seven years. In addition to that, they offer important technical IT and communications advice. They now feel that they need to hand over the reins to someone else. They do not intend to step down immediately and leave us without web support; they would be pleased to discuss what the role involves with anyone who might like to find out more. Miggie and Dave will say and write more about this in the weeks ahead.

I took over from Graham Carey, somewhat unexpectedly, in the spring of 2021. These were anxious and uncertain times. In the midst of the pandemic, we had to focus on how best to keep our u3a operating at all. There was uncertainty about whether people could meet at all, and if we could, what were the rules? We learned new language - 'social distancing', the 'rule of six', 'bubbles'. Who could be a member of our bubble? Could we meet indoors or must it only be outdoors? Were face masks compulsory? We were anxious about the health and well-being of friends, families and neighbours. We experimented with on-line meetings, hybrid meetings, open air meetings and other inventive ideas. It came as a considerable relief when the vaccine proved a game changer, and something approximating to normal life resumed.

One thing we wanted to do as we emerged from lockdowns, was to re-launch our u3a. Our aim was to make sure as many people as possible knew who we are and what we can offer to individuals and the community. Across the whole membership we all put our efforts into an Open Day in the Strand Centre. We aimed to increase awareness, to grow our membership, and also having a lot of fun, working together. It was an opportunity to collaborate, be creative, aim for something worthwhile. It was a great success. We set ourselves a target of increasing our membership from just shy of 100 to over 200. Many of us felt that was unrealistic, but here we are, consistently around that level. With not all the renewals complete, we are hoping again to achieve a membership of 200 which we have all but achieved in the past year.

While I am pleased (as is the Treasurer) that we have a buoyant membership and solid financial position, I remain concerned about our future – for various reasons.

The first reason will come as no surprise. Members must be weary of hearing me ask for volunteers to serve on the committee or take the lead in interest groups. But the fact remains that we have a real problem.

Second, I have been looking at what some of our neighbours in the u3a movement are offering. Much of it is impressive. And this makes it hard not to be rather disappointed by our own offering. More than one of our neighbours is offering over 70 interest groups with a wide appeal. Something for everyone. This compares with our list of just over 20. Some interest groups are currently not functioning because we have no-one prepared to step forward as a convener. We certainly do have some vibrant, active interest groups, very well led. Now I am about to step aside from my

Chair's and some other non-u3a responsibilities, I intend to get involved in more groups than I have been able to in recent times, and if there is support, perhaps create a new one. I pay tribute to members who have created new groups and are offering good leadership. It is essential that we do more to innovate and energise in this area, and our Groups Coordinator Barry is working hard to that end. But this is a challenge not for the committee but for all our members. I hope we will rise to the challenge.

For many members, while interest groups matter, their main focus is on our monthly meetings. Sadly, Khim Sim will be leaving Dawlish and moving out of the area, so will no longer be our Speakers Secretary. For several years, she has organised a lively and varied programme of speakers. If the new committee agrees – and unless someone else volunteers – I will attempt to fill her shoes. Fortunately, she has a programme in place for some months to come, so I won't be panicking about who we can invite next month. I wish Khim Sim well and thank her for all her efforts – not least in forming the Luncheon Club and for organising our Christmas Lunch.

I have really enjoyed my time in this role, and I hope I have contributed to the life of this u3a. It is certainly time for me to step aside and allow others to take the lead. I am confident that there is enough talent and energy in the new committee and the membership as a whole to ensure that the Dawlish & District u3a has a bright future. I look forward to continuing to enjoy my membership, varied activities and the many friends Lynne and I have made through the u3a.

John Vick
Chair, Dawlish & District u3a
7th September 2026