



## Annual General Meeting 2026

### **Chairs' Annual Report 2025/6**

South East London u3a has recovered from Covid! The pandemic had a lasting impact on our level of activities and membership numbers for 6 years but finally the number of members topped 700 by the end of the year - and with 81 interest groups on the go.

Interest groups: One or two groups have folded, and this is natural. But more members have come forward to start new groups including some which, like Ladywell discussion and Tai Chi have been very popular from the start.

Attempts to have more groups meeting at the Lewisham end of our area have not progressed as we would hope and we still need members in the area to bring forward ideas to start new groups and find new venues. We are always open to ideas for new groups and venues (but the venues need to meet certain criteria like accessibility and value.)

New members and Friday talks: We are always trying to recruit, including at local events and via the website as well as by word of mouth and this year we introduced an online application form which has really helped. Over the last year we have welcomed a lot of new people at our new members' meetings which follow our bi-monthly Friday talks. We have had some terrific Friday talks which have been extremely popular including a packed audience last July for "Preparing for the Inevitable" and a highly informative talk by Dr Kathryn Harkup in March about how Agatha Christie showed us how to kill people by poisoning them (and get away with it.)

u3a organisation health check and volunteers: We carried out a "Health check" devised by the national u3a to assess how well we were managing our society (levels of activity, avoiding unplanned financial deficits etc) and although we came out of this quite well, we recognised that we do not have a good record of the level of volunteering in our u3a beyond just counting the group convenors so we have been trying to improve this. There is a notional target of at least 20% of members volunteering in some capacity and we are a little short of that. We are always looking for members to organise outings, walks or visits to galleries, give talks and lead discussions, or help with catering at events. There is a regular need for help "behind the scenes" too, especially in producing our communications material.

Emergency contacts initiative: In January, we launched an initiative to encourage members to keep on their person when out and about details of a contact in case of an emergency. This followed a number of incidents during group activities where this information proved invaluable. We are also gathering emergency contact information to put in each member's record on our u3a database: note the information will only be accessible to Committee members and convenors with a need to know. We exhort members to do to provide the relevant information.

Improved communications: Our Communications team work hard to produce our weekly news email sent to 98% of members and read by over 80% most weeks. Mark and his team are very successful in keeping our website up-to-date. In February, we launched an Instagram account as a new way of reaching potential members as well as offering them a visually appealing way of seeing what activities our u3a engages in. Many thanks to Valerie Fairbrass who has been posting frequent stories on Instagram.

Members and the Committee: Sadly, we lost our characterful former Membership Secretary, Richard Beck, who died during the year. Two of our current Committee members, Gina Raggett and Angie Weir, are standing down this year. We would like to thank them for their hard work over their term of office. We have recruited one new Committee member, Barbara Lowden, this year. Under our Constitution we are allowed 12 Committee members but only have 8 as things stand. There are lots of jobs to do requiring no previous experience and we would welcome more applications! We meet about seven times a year, and the meetings are both friendly and supportive.

We are both stepping back from being co-chairs having held the job for four years. It has been a delight and a privilege, and we are proud of where our u3a now stands. Our plan is to stay on the Committee for a final year supporting the new leadership.

So, we would like to thank all those members – Committee, convenors, the communications team, the members who make refreshments, everyone who gives their time to make our u3a what it is so that we may continue to learn, laugh and live!

Chris Melville and Tim Crossley

April 2026