

Chester U3A, Chair's report 2025/2026

Overall, 2025-6 has been a very successful year for Chester u3a with increasing numbers of members (now over 1200), a new venue for Tuesday meetings, greater attendances at our meetings, an increase in the variety and number of groups, and some encouraging steps in building partnerships with Chester University.

Once again, Sue, our Speaker Secretary has planned a variety of excellent talks – something for everyone. The social aspects of the meetings have greatly improved with Dianna and Annie providing refreshments at both our venues, supported by groups, and more recently our newly created Really Useful Members. Liz, as Membership Secretary has made sure that new/potential members are supported when arriving at meetings, and we will continue to ensure that everyone is welcome and makes repeat visits.

Group Co-ordinators, Dianna and Steve, have continued to meet up with Group Leaders to ensure they have the necessary support to fulfil their role. A Group Leader survey was also completed this year, which has identified the need for further support in groups to use Beacon as a means of communicating and keeping group membership lists up-to-date. It also identified the need to ensure that enquiries are answered promptly, and that where groups are at capacity, we support the leaders to create opportunities for new members/groups if they can. The groups have also been involved in 2 Showcases and a series of talks at Storyhouse on the theme of 'Chester u3a goes Green' which was planned by Catherine from the committee.

As well as updating all our policies, for which Diane has played a key part in ensuring consistency and correct content, we have also been collating risk assessments for the group leaders to share with their group members to ensure everyone is safe during meetings. We would encourage members to read our policies, all of which are available on the website, so you understand the ethos of what we do and the need for kindness in all our interactions.

Our collaboration with the University of Chester has brought a wide range of speakers to our meetings, and this partnership also led to a very successful joint Festival of Ideas event – Alice through the Looking Glass – where our members, and students at the university, were asked to give advice to their younger or older selves. It produced some really interesting research, and surprisingly similar mindset. I think the u3a motto – Learn, Laugh, Live - fitted in very well. I also attended a North-West u3a meeting and a NW network event to find out a bit more about what is happening in local u3a's.

Peter, Vice Chair, has done a brilliant job with our website, supported by Joan, in ensuring it is up-to-date and useful. Chester Times is our excellent newsletter, edited by Gwen & Joyce – it is just disappointing that so few of our members read it, and we are doing all we can to encourage increasing numbers of readers. Thank you also to Diane who has written up the talks - using AI where she can – Chester u3a gets more future-focussed!

Sandra had to step down as Social Secretary, and we thank her for her support. She handed over to Jeff, our Business Secretary, as well as Diana and Ruth, in order to plan a variety of coach trips, train trips, walks and a holiday, using Jones as our booking company. This has worked very successfully, and we look forward to more trips in 2027. Thank you also to Dave, our Treasurer, who keeps our money safe for social trips as well as groups, meetings and other activities.

I have decided to step down this year after 2 years as Chair, and 1 year as Membership Secretary. I am sure the new Chair and committee, when voted in at the AGM, will continue to build on all the things I have put in place including the importance of learning, shared activities and meetings, team-work, getting out and about and ensuring opportunities are available for everyone to enjoy retirement.

Fran Reading, September 2026