

John Butler

Ravenshead u3a – East Midlands

The strength and significance of local u3as in the u3a Movement is paramount. It is where the “rubber meets the road” and where the true value of the u3a ethos in the main is delivered, day after day, by volunteer Committee Members and Interest Group Leaders.

The Trust board has been developing a Vision and a Strategy for creating a greater awareness of the u3a movement nationally, as well as advocating for older people. However, our unique strength as an organisation is in delivering local non-formal educational activities, and helping our members enjoy strong and meaningful friendships through sharing common passions and interests.

The means of communication between the National Council, County Networks and the local u3as and their members is difficult because of the operational independence of each u3a. It is further hindered by the fact that the u3a movement has no central UK database through which it can communicate directly with all u3a members, and neither do the Region or County Networks.

Based upon my own u3a's recent member survey, the majority of our members have no real interest in what happens beyond their own interest groups and our u3a, despite my efforts to inform them and encourage greater engagement with the u3a Movement. I suspect that is the case with most other local u3as. I know well the issues that affect my home u3a, but each u3a is different, so although we may face similar challenges there is a diversity in approach and opinions.

As to my background, I joined Ravenshead u3a as a member in 2014 whilst still working part-time. My involvement as a u3a trustee started in the 2020 Covid pandemic when my experience of facilitating Zoom Conferences was mentioned to the then Chair. She asked me to host u3a meetings online during lockdowns and then subsequently run hybrid meetings as restrictions eased. I was then co-opted onto our committee to take on the role of Publicity Officer, including starting up our u3a's social media presence, followed by 1 year as Business Secretary as well as 3 years as Chair, and will step down from that role in April this year. In October last year I was elected Chair of the Nottingham Network of u3as, and also invited to join and contribute to the new Regional Support Team for the East Midlands Region. Through my role as Lead Trust Volunteer of the u3a Let's Talk Tech Technology Subject Network, I have been serving the u3a Movement as a Trust Volunteer since 2021, and made many strong connections with members and officers across the UK, as well as the staff in the Trust office.

My personal reason for wanting to represent the East Midlands as a Council Representative is that I believe that my motivation, organisational skills and interpersonal communication capabilities will enable me to actively listen, support and interact with people within our u3a Networks, local u3a committees and at member level, and be proactive in communicating their views to the National Council.