

Chair and Members of the Children, Education & Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel
States Assembly
c/o States Greffe
Morier House
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22/12/25

Attention of:
Amelia Cushion
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Dear Deputy Curtis and Members of the Scrutiny Panel

Re: Scrutiny Review of Lifelong Learning in Jersey

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to your review of lifelong vocational learning in Jersey. This important initiative closely aligns with the u3a ethos and mission, both locally and across the United Kingdom. We actively welcome and support your work. With over 300 members in Jersey and around 400,000 across the UK, u3a is one of the largest and most vibrant lifelong learning communities.

The u3a (University of the Third Age) believes that learning is a lifelong journey that enriches individuals, especially those who are retired or semi-retired. Our association stands on the following core principles:

- 1) **Voluntary Participation:** we encourage members to get involved in a range of learning activities, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone shares knowledge and experiences without the pressure of formal education.
- 2) **Self-Directed Learning:** we empower members to explore subjects that interest them, which leads to greater satisfaction and deeper engagement.
- 3) **Mutual Support and Collaboration:** our members function as both learners and teachers, promoting collaboration and community where everyone freely exchanges knowledge and builds personal connections.
- 4) **Diverse Learning Opportunities:** we offer a wide variety of courses and activities, catering to diverse interests and capabilities, and ensuring a welcoming environment for all.
- 5) **Social Engagement:** we prioritise social interaction, recognising that connection and friendship play a vital role in well-being and enhance the learning experience. Members significantly prefer in-person engagement to online activities.

As an association we value inclusivity, welcoming every individual regardless of background or experience. We foster a culture of learning and exploration. We empower individuals to take control of their own learning. We focus on building a supportive and active community.

Response to the Panel's Questions

- 1) **Adequacy of Opportunities for Lifelong Vocational Learning** - u3a Jersey offers a range of informal, peer-led learning activities for older adults, focusing on personal growth, social engagement, cognitive health, and selfless entertainment. Experience shows that voluntary participation and self-directed learning deliver highly valued results.
- 2) **Funding and Support** - we keep membership affordable at £18 per year and rely heavily on volunteers and community partners. Our main challenge is securing venues at low or no cost. Support from organisations such as Santander Bank who allow us the use of their meeting rooms at the Santander Works Cafe at zero cost and the owners of the Old Rectory, St Saviour who charge a minimal fee for their facility enables us to run our interest groups, but limited resources restrict our options. Members host groups in their homes.ⁱ
- 3) **Quality and Outcomes** - success is measured by increased wellbeing, confidence, and participation. Members report new friendships, improved mental health, and a renewed sense of purpose through u3a activities.
- 4) **Accessibility and Inclusivity** - u3a provides both in-person and online activities. Nearly every member uses email and has access to the Jersey and UK u3a websites, and we ensure printed newsletters reach those who need them – less than five members.
- 5) **Barriers to Participation** - members tend to leave when they cannot take part in our activities, often due to; age, health, transport (no longer able to drive), and ongoing caring duties. Other members have grandchildren responsibilities, especially during school holidays, which limits their active involvement.
- 6) **Meeting the Needs of Learners Across Life Stages** - we seek to cater to a wide range of interests and abilities. However, we struggle to find volunteers willing to lead new groups, which excludes us from expanding offer to existing and prospective new members. Our convenors give their time generously, and we appreciate their commitment. We would be keen to grow our association but only if we are able to provide members with something of value for their membership.
- 7) **Gaps in Skills or Sectors** – u3a respects older adults want to enhance their digital skills training, as well as opportunities in creative, cultural, and community sectors. Local members are tech savvy—most use online banking to pay their subscription fee or for the payment of social events. At the recent members' Christmas lunch all made payment by card or use of the mobile phone contactless system. A seminar on AI, hosted by Digital Jersey was well attended by members who found it thoughtful and informative if daunting. Notwithstanding, members are concerned about online scamming and fraud.
- 8) **Responsiveness to Labour Market and Emerging Workforce Demand** – we do not offer formal or accredited training and are not engaged in the labour market or workforce demand.

Conclusion

In closing, we wholeheartedly endorse the Scrutiny Panel's review of lifelong learning in Jersey. We recognise this initiative as a vital step towards building a more inclusive, accessible, and dynamic learning environment for all islanders, especially those in later life. Our experience proves that lifelong learning is not only about acquiring new skills, but also about fostering wellbeing, social connection, and a sense of purpose—values that are at the heart of our association. We encourage the Panel to champion approaches that prioritise inclusivity, flexibility, and empowerment. This includes supporting affordable access to venues and recognising the unique contributions of older adults to Jersey's social and economic life. Together, we can realise a vision of lifelong learning where everyone is encouraged to learn, laugh, and live.

Yours sincerely

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ⁱ The Philip Maurant Centre would suit many of our group activities. Our groups only take place during the day and not at weekends. We priced to use a room at the Public Library for one group, we found the fee prohibitive.