

# **2008 Thames Valley Regional U3A Conference**

## **U3A - The Nuts and Bolts and the Way Forward “What U3A can do for you and what you can do for U3A”**

This Conference was planned and organised by four local U3As: Chinnor & District, Haddenham, Thame & District and Greater Thame. They adopted the title CHATT for the organising Committee.

The Conference took place on Wednesday 28th May at Lord Williams's Lower School and was attended by around 120 delegates from the 34 U3As within the Thames Valley. They were warmly welcomed by the Conference Chairman, Mike Price (Greater Thame) who introduced the theme for the day.

The keynote speaker for the opening session was Eric Midwinter, one of the three “founding fathers” of the Third Age Movement in Britain in 1982. He spoke of the history of the U3A and the aspirations and ideology of his fellow founders Peter Laslett and Michael Young. Bearing in mind that “the third age” is defined as “those who are no longer in full-time gainful employment” he described how Peter Laslett challenged the idea that people would be limited in what they did as they got older because they were ageing. Michael Young believed that everyone was special and had something to offer and that this was most effective if organised collectively.

Linking in with the theme for the Conference Eric Midwinter was full of encouragement as new U3As are springing up all around the country. Between them they provide a richly diverse opportunity for members to further their learning, share their expertise and enrich their social activities. Looking to the future he said “it is important to remember that you need members. They may do something later!” Quoting someone he had met at one time who had said “You’ll never start a U3A round here, it’s full of old people!” he pointed out that we must recognise that the U3A is not for everyone. But he was sure that everyone who could benefit from a U3A should be in a U3A.

Following this talk delegates dispersed to take part in the six Discussion Groups arranged as part of the programme for the day. These were: Legal Aspects and Responsibilities of U3As; Encouraging Involvement; Interest Groups; Inspiring Visits; Are Monthly Meetings Necessary, Does Size Matter? and U3A-Education and/or Leisure?

There was much lively discussion following our inspiring keynote speech and this spilled over into the lunch break which fairly “buzzed” with conversation.

The Discussion Groups had been led by Leaders drawn from the organising U3As and they were supported by Recorders who reported back to the Conference at the start of the afternoon session. Their reports will be summarised in the overall Conference report.

Terry Hardy, Finance Officer at the Third Age Trust, stood in for Lin Jonas, Administrator who was unable to be with us. He spoke of each U3A as being an independent body gave an overview of the support offered through the Third Age Trust. He then went on to address the various issues that U3As in the Thames Valley had raised prior to this Conference. These ranged from Charity Commission requirements, Registration to Gift Aid, payments to speakers and Insurance matters to accounts. He also brought the Conference up-to-date with the resolution agreed at the recent EGM of the Third Age Trust and the effect on the Thames Valley U3As. The Third Age Trust is now organising its erstwhile Areas into Regions in line with Government Statistical Regions. This is now a matter for our Thames Valley U3As to consider at their Chairmen's meeting.

Professor Peter Jarvis, Chairman of Thatcham U3A, gave an enthusiastic overview of the day. Then, together with the incoming Chairman of Newbury, he also spoke briefly of the Conference being planned for 2009 and hosted by their U3As.

The Conference ended with tea and cakes. This gave delegates an opportunity to speak with Terry Hardy who was much in demand. Once again there was a real “buzz” of discussion and conversation over the teacups.

To see photos of the conference click [here](#)