

What is U3A?

Origins of U3A

U3A was first proposed by Prof. Pierre Vellas of the University of Toulouse in 1973 as l'Université du Troisième Age de Toulouse, a part of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The objectives were:

- To raise the quality of life of older people
- To provide an education programme for older people
- To initiate research into age issues
- To set up education programmes in gerontology

Variations of the U3A model soon spread and it is now a truly international organisation. For more information see:

[International Association of Universities of the Third Age \(AIUTA\)](https://worldu3a.org/index.htm)
<https://worldu3a.org/index.htm>



Pierre Vellas

1924 - 2005

U3A in the UK

It was brought to the UK in 1981 by three founders - Peter Lasslet, Michael Young and Eric Midwinter. They adopted a different model, with no direct links to any university, and instead set up a model run by members, for members and where “the teachers learn and the learners teach”. They did retain the same name as a direct translation, University of the Third Age or U3A.

In 1982 The Third Age Trust was set up as the national support and advisory body for U3A.



Eric Midwinter

1932 -



Michael Young

1915 - 2002



Peter Lasslet

1915 - 2001

What is meant by The Third Age?

U3A membership is not related to a specific age but to a period in one's life, the so-called Third Age.

- The First Age in life is childhood, when we are dependent on others.
- The Second Age is adulthood, inter-dependent with responsibilities in work and family life.
- The Third Age is retirement or semi-retirement, independent but still active.

Anybody in their third age can join U3A and this includes people who are working part-time. There is no lower age for membership.

Principles of the U3A Movement

The U3A movement is non-religious and non-political and has three main principles:

The Third Age Principle

- Membership of a U3A is open to all in their third age, which is defined not by a particular age but by a period in life in which full time employment has ceased.
- Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a U3A.
- Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a U3A can do so.

The Self-help Learning Principle

- Members form interest groups covering as wide a range of topics and activities as they desire; by the members, for the members.
- No qualifications are sought or offered. Learning is for its own sake, with enjoyment being the prime motive, not qualifications or awards.
- There is no distinction between the learners and the teachers; they are all U3A members.

The Mutual Aid Principle

- Each U3A is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent but a member of The Third Age Trust, which requires adherence to the guiding principles of the U3A movement.
- No payments are made to members for services rendered to any U3A.
- Each U3A is self-funded with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.
- Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the U3A movement.



Retire from your work, don't retire from life

