

U3A - international

The University of the Third Age (U3A) is an international movement active in most countries in the world. The aim is to promote lifelong learning.

The University of the Third Age (U3A) is an international movement which aims to promote lifelong learning for mainly retired members of the community - those in their third 'age' of life. The 'third age' is generally defined as a time in your life (not necessarily chronological) where you have the opportunity to undertake learning for its own sake.

Members of U3A programmes are motivated by various issues: a desire to gain new knowledge (either for general interest or because such learning opportunities were denied to them in earlier years), the need to develop new relationships, a need for a sense of purpose in life and learning how to live, be active and have fun. In the case of older members this is probably best described as 'active ageing'.

International

There are U3A organisations in France, the United Kingdom, Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, Russia, China, Japan, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, South America, Canada and the United States. In the United States, organisations similar to U3A are called lifelong learning institutes and in Canada the movement is known as The Third Age Network (TAN).

History

U3A was started in France (see also 'Universities of all Ages' below) by Prof. Pierre Vellas at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Toulouse in 1973. The goal was to provide lifelong learning and diverse cultural activities for seniors.

U3A models

There is no universally accepted model for the U3A. The two dominant U3A models adopted by different countries are the 'French model' and the 'UK model'.

In France, almost every University of the Third Age University group was linked with a local university. This academic model is still used in many other countries, especially in continental Europe.

In 1982 the UK modified the French U3A concept of being an extramural university activity to become a voluntary organisation with an emphasis on sharing knowledge without formal education links. This is now known as the 'UK (or geragogic) model'.

Many U3As throughout the world have adopted a combination of both models to suit their own culture.

Organisational structures

One of the movement's greatest strengths is its grassroots autonomy. Even in countries where central U3A national or state organisations exist, little or no attempt is made to impose direction at the local level.

Because each U3A is autonomous, they offer a different mix of courses or interest groups depending on what members want and who has the skill, knowledge - and interest - to run such groups. The objective of U3A is to be a university in the original sense of the word, an egalitarian community (or learning co-operative) of teachers and learners, by sharing interests and enthusiasms. All members are potentially teachers as well as learners and the focus is on group activities and learning for pleasure.

In the UK, although there is a national coordinating body, each U3A branch is formally structured as an independent self-financing and self-managing organisation, which is managed by unpaid volunteers. By and large, members do everything for themselves. Running costs are covered by a small annual membership fee.

Each individual U3A branch comprises a number of interest groups that may cover a wide range of different topics and activities, for example, educational videos/talks/webinars/study groups/workshops on any subject, language groups, and many less educationally focused activities, such as excursions, health, fitness and leisure activities (including countryside walks), discussions, games, theatre/concert/restaurant clubs, travel clubs, and dance in all its forms. Physical activities are often included as part of a balanced lifestyle approach. Some branches offer virtual participation via the internet. The objective is to provide a wide range of opportunities to come together to learn for fun and ways of exploring new ideas, skills and activities together.

South Africa

U3A was introduced to South Africa by Sylvia Schrire who founded the first U3A in Cape Town in 2000.

South African U3A branches tend to follow the UK model and organisational structure. It was recognised that most people of retirement age have experience and expertise in almost all walks of life. Every member has something to contribute and the emphasis is on sharing knowledge and skills without education-related constraints. In fact, in the UK it was decided to no longer use the terms 'University' or 'Third Age' but to adopt the name 'u3a'. Plett u3a has followed the UK's naming convention.

There is no central U3A coordinating body in South Africa, although the Cape Town-based U3A organisation (u3a.org.za) performs a central file storage function, mainly for webinar materials.

Universities of All Ages

In 1981 France passed the 'French Union of Universities of the 3rd Age' (UFUTA) law to promote the development of university-associated U3A meetings and exchanges. However, faced with the difficulty of defining the 'third age' (an abstract notion variable over time) the French Union of Third Age Universities changed its statutes in 1993 to become the French Union of Universities of All Ages (UTA).

This new definition reflected a twofold concern:

- The need to break with the university enrolment requirements
- To promote 'inter-generational' meetings and exchanges to avoid the pitfall of the age restriction.

The UTAs, with few exceptions, are now open to anyone with free time without age and diploma conditions and take various names such as University of All Ages (UTA), Inter-Ages (UIA), Retirement and Free Time (UTL), Third Time (UTT), Permanent (UP) and Leisure Universities to reflect the changing emphasis and broader community focus.

Plett u3a has adopted the Universities of All Ages philosophy: membership is open to anyone with free time without age and educational requirements. Hence we no longer call ourselves 'University of the Third Age'.

Sources: [u3a - Home](#), [UFUTA – French Union of Universities of All Ages](#), [University of the Third Age - Wikipedia](#), [U3A historical paper \(worldu3a.org\)](#), [International Association of the Third Age \(IAUTA\)](#), [UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE \(ilearnthinking.org\)](#)