

U3A



This is U3A

Learning is for life

Nobody has to stop learning just because they've stopped working.

The University of the Third Age is for people who want to keep active in mind and body and are no longer in full-time employment.

There's first age learning – at school, college, university.

There's second age learning – the skills learnt at work.

And there's third age learning, when people learn whatever they want. That's what happens in U3A. Groups come together to study a subject they all find interesting.

Learning is interpreted in the broadest possible sense. Subjects covered range from Art to Zoology, with Mah Jong and walking and chess and photography and pretty well everything else you can name in between.

Subjects don't have to be academic – hundreds of U3A groups enjoy physical activities.

A U3A is set up whenever a group of individuals want to enjoy that sort of learning. With help from the National Office, they set up a U3A in their area and their U3A becomes a member of the Third Age Trust.

There are well over 700 U3As throughout the U.K. Over a quarter of a million people have decided to keep on learning and are enjoying the benefits of belonging to U3A.

U3A members are typically busy people, leading at least as full and satisfying lives as when they worked full-time. They have a continuing sense of achievement with something to look forward to every day.



Life is for learning



SYLVIA

In U3A I have learnt how rewarding doing things together can be. Sharing skills for leisurely learning retains a feeling of purposeful existence as well as an endless social calendar.



Thinking

Most U3As have academic interest groups. Some practise modern languages, others perform pantomimes in Latin. There are groups that write poetry and others studying chemistry.

Some take up subjects they haven't touched since their schooldays. Many more turn to things they have always wanted to do but never had the chance.

Sometimes people who hated school are persuaded to try science or maths and discover they enjoy it when freed from curriculum and examination demands.

U3A does not pay tutors. But groups don't have to depend on finding an expert in their U3A; there's a Resource Centre that can support anyone willing to learn as they teach, and all who want to learn have the opportunity to help with the teaching.

It makes an amazing difference when everyone helps everyone else; if it's not fun, it's not U3A.



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Looking

U3A takes its work very seriously. A lot of research is done every year by individuals and by groups. Sometimes a whole U3A combines to work on a topic important to them. For example, Barmouth U3A has studied the local Mawddach estuary; and the history of shopping in their city was the subject of a Perth U3A project.

Sometimes members from different U3As will work together on a major topic. Museums, libraries and art galleries are always willing to help and liaise with U3As in shared learning projects. These have produced some very significant reports, in collaboration with Somerset House, Dulwich Art Gallery and the London Archeological Archives among others.

As well as these large scale investigations individuals can simply satisfy their curiosity about a street name or a stained glass window. That can prove of great interest to the community. The satisfaction of knowing that a job is well done is what U3A members are looking for.



PAULINE

The U3A has changed my life – friendship, companionship, improving one's skills, and one's mind, learning to play bridge and singing in a choir. There aren't enough days in the week!



Making

There are people who make music, who sing together and play together; people paint who have never painted in their lives before.

Sculpture and woodcarving have proved popular with people who never knew they were so talented.

Creative writing produces many treasures and there are always artists who will help with illustrations – drawings, cartoons, or superb pictures from the digital photography groups. Between them they have produced many books – one U3A even became a fully-fledged publisher for a collection of its members' work.

All the usual handicrafts are practised. Knitting and needlework provide items for charities which know that they can rely on U3A. The members also enjoy passing on these skills to youngsters, (and are always happy to learn something new from a younger generation).

These could be called cultural activities – but U3A does them for fun.

One creative member is Carol Cummins, seen opposite rehearsing for Christchurch U3A's production of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*.



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Playing

It isn't all hard work being a U3A member. There's plenty of time for games, which are just as useful as academic studies in keeping brains alert and active.

Bridge is very popular, with Scrabble not far behind. Chess and Mah Jong are the favourites among board games, but there are also groups which prefer draughts or Monopoly or Rummikub. There may even be a snakes and ladders group somewhere. These can be played in people's homes and often the host or hostess is someone who can't get out easily to go to meetings.

Drama groups write or improvise their own plays, and take them on tour as well – to neighbouring U3As or going to hospitals and care homes.

And the social life, whatever activities people choose, contributes to the wellbeing of members.





Doing

Physical activity is more fun with other people who share common interests. There are many U3A walking groups.

Bowls and boules, barn dancing and ballroom, swimming and skittles are just a few of the very physical activities U3A members enjoy. They know that keeping their body fit will help them to enjoy life more.

Indoors or outdoors, U3A members get involved in all sorts of sports and games.

And of course, sports and games provide the opportunity for competition, which can be organised among neighbouring U3As or with local enthusiasts.

One remarkable example of U3A activity was undertaken by Ken Brazier (left) of Princes Risborough U3A. He climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania, raising £16,000 for the medical charity Mercy Ships.



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More ...

U3A is different:

- There is no curriculum – people learn what they wish and if they see an interesting angle, they follow it.
- There are no entrance qualifications – a desire to learn is all that is needed.
- There are no exams or certificates – people enjoy their learning; they do not need to prove they've done it.
- There are no terms. U3A groups decide their own times to meet.
- There are no lecturers. U3As embark on voyages of discovery.
- There is no campus and no buildings. Sometimes the U3A uses public buildings, sometimes a member's home.



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