

What is a University of the Third Age?

A University of the Third Age is a learning co-operative of older people, which enables members to share many educational, creative and leisure activities. Activities are organised mainly in small groups that meet regularly, often in each other's homes. Members, through sharing their knowledge, skills and experience, learn from each other.

Although all local U3As remain operationally independent, they are members of The Third Age Trust. As such they must abide by both the original Objects and Principles written by Peter Laslett in 1981 and the and the Principles of the U3A Movement (2014).

The Trust is a national, umbrella body (a registered charity and limited company) which represents all U3As in the UK at national and international level. It is run by a National Executive Committee democratically elected from the membership and offers a range of services, to support and advise local U3As.

The U3A movement is growing all the time; approximately 50 new U3As are started every year. They pursue an amazing range of topics; some academic, some practical and others recreational. Most local U3As offer a combination of opportunities to study, create, socialise, and contribute greatly to members' overall health and wellbeing.

U3A is the only national education organisation in the UK run entirely by its own members.

The Principles of the U3A Movement

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

The Third Age Principle

- a) 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.
- b) Members promote the values of lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a U3A.
- c) Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a U3A can do so.

The Self-help Learning Principle

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

The Mutual Aid Principle

- a) 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.
- b) No payments are made to members for services rendered to any U3A.
- c) Each U3A is self-funded with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.
- d) Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the U3A movement.

Original Objects and Principles

Title

The word university in the name of the institution shall be used in its original sense, meaning a corporation of persons devoted to a particular activity, not necessarily intellectual. It shall not be taken to denote all the associations which have grown up around the world, especially in the last century and in England. Other academic titles shall be avoided as far as possible.

Objects

First: to educate British society at large in the facts of its present age constitution and of its permanent situation in respect of ageing. One of the first of the 'old' societies, we find ourselves in a position which is bound to share with all developed societies and finally with the whole world's population.

Second: to make those in their later years in Britain aware of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic potentialities, and of their value to themselves and to their society. To assail the dogma of intellectual decline with age.

Third: to provide from amongst the retired, the resources for the development and intensification of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic lives. In this way to help them to make effective and satisfying use of their freedom from work at the office, shop or factory. To devise methods of doing this which can be afforded in Britain.

Fourth: to create an institution for these purposes where there is no distinction between the class of those who teach and those who learn, where the activity is voluntary, freely offered by the members of the university to other members and to other people.

Fifth: so to organise this institution that learning is pursued, skills acquired, interests are developed for themselves alone with no reference to qualifications, awards or personal advancement.

Sixth: to mobilise members of the university so as to help the very large number of elderly persons in Britain standing in need of educational stimulation but who have no wish to engage in university studies.

Seventh: to undertake research on the process of ageing in society and especially on the position of the elderly in Britain and the means of its improvement.

Eighth: to encourage the establishment of similar institutions in every part of the country where conditions are suitable, and to collaborate with them.

Principles

- (1) The university shall consist of a body of persons who undertake to learn and to help others learn. Those who teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach.
- (2) Joining the university shall be a question of personal choice. No qualifications shall be required, and no judgement made by the university between applicants.
- (3) Everyone joining the university shall pay for its upkeep and for instruction received. These payments shall be the sustaining revenue of the institution apart from the gifts by foundations. No support from the funds of local or central governments shall be expected or sought.
- (4) No salary, fee or financial reward shall be paid to any member of the university for teaching other members, counselling them, or helping them in any way.
- (5) All members of the university shall be expected to offer voluntary service to it and to its activities in relation to society at large, especially to the elderly.
- (6) Members shall be prepared to help organise assistance in the way of voluntary manpower for educational, cultural and other institutions which may be able to use such manpower, and which under present conditions are prevented from fulfilling their functions as they would like. Examples are art galleries, museums and libraries.
- (7) The undertaking of all members to teach as well as to learn may be fulfilled in the following ways other than instruction: counselling other members; taking the university's offerings into the homes of the housebound, the bedridden, those in retirement institutions or in hospitals; helping the effort to provide intellectual stimulus for the mass of the elderly in Britain; taking part in any other offer of manpower made by the university and educational or cultural institutions which stand in need of it.
- (8) The university itself shall not engage in the activity of judging between its members. There shall be no examination system, neither degrees, diplomas or certificates shall be awarded. Nevertheless, classes within the university engaged in any particular intellectual or other exercise may decide on ways of recording an individual success in the exercise in question.
- (9) The curriculum of the university shall be as wide as resources permit, ranging from mathematics and natural sciences, by way of philosophy, literature and history, to aesthetic, practical and physical training. Nevertheless the preference of members will be the only criterion of what is done, and it is recognised that humane subjects are likely to dominate.
- (10) The standards of the university shall be those set by its individual classes, and ways shall be devised to permit each member to find his own level. There shall be no attempt to set a university-wide standard, or any assimilation with university standards elsewhere.

(11) Studies related to the specific institution of the elderly - social, psychological, physiological - shall be included as a matter of course. They will be given no particular prominence in teaching but high priority in research.

(12) In pursuance of the aesthetic, art historical and topographical interests known to be popular with the type of student likely to be a member of the university, special arrangements shall be sought with national bodies such as the Arts Council, the National Trust, the Department of the Environment, the Nature Conservancy and the Forestry Commission, so as to obtain the facilities required to develop instruction and research in these fields. Voluntary assistance where appropriate (see above - Principle 6) shall be offered in return.

(13) Strong emphasis will be laid on research in all the university's activities. Every member will be encouraged to join in the widespread accumulation of scattered data required for advancement in knowledge of certain kinds (for example, archaeology, natural history, the history of the population and social structure, the history of climate and geological events). Every member will be expected, where possible, to have a research project of his or her own, and to write up its results. Engaging in research, however, shall not count as fulfilling the obligation to teach.

(14) Insistence on learning as an end in itself shall go along with an emphasis on the value of making things and acquiring and improving skills of all kinds. The curriculum shall therefore include, if there is a demand, and if facilities can be found, such subjects as computer programming, accountancy, business and managerial studies, spoken languages and handicrafts in textiles, metal work, wood work, book binding, printing and so on. Painting, sculpture and music shall be given high priority.

(15) Special importance shall be attached to physical training and suitable supporting activities and negotiations entered into for these purposes with local institutions disposing of these facilities.

(16) The closest possible collaboration shall be maintained with the extramural boards of universities, with WEA and with all providers of adult education programmes in each area. Ways shall be sought to take advantage of all such teaching and research facilities as may be available in any local institution and to negotiate for services of any individual willing to assist the university though not himself wishing to become a member.

(17) The form taken by each individual pursuit of the University of the Third Age shall be decided on each occasion by members collaborating for the purpose. Though the conventional taught 'class' will often be the form adopted, every encouragement will be given to seminars with many participants; readings; activities to sites of scientific, archaeological or historical interest, museums, art collections, houses and so on.

(18) Every effort shall be made to encourage interchange with universities of the third age at home and abroad, to exchange teaching with them, to collaborate on research with them; to unite with them in the furtherance of intellectual interests of the elderly, especially

in Britain.

(19) Apart from the voluntary research undertakings of its members on every suitable subject, the university shall seek to set up professional research activity in the processes of ageing, especially as a social phenomenon.