



The Third Age Trust

A brief history

www.u3a.org.uk

is the national umbrella organisation operating through a National Executive Committee to support the network of Affiliated **u3as** throughout the UK. It encourages the formation of new **u3as**, publishes the '*Third Age Matters*' magazine and organises Conferences and Summer Schools around the UK.

In 1972 **u3a** began in France where the Université de Troisième Age was founded by Toulouse University. They introduced short courses for retired students and early developments were dependant upon university sponsorship.

By contrast, due to the long history of Adult Education here in the UK, it was decided that the British **u3as** would be more independent of the academic world, drawing instead on the wealth of knowledge and expertise available within the membership.

This more informal 'shared learning' model has now been adopted in many other countries. The original French name uses the word 'university' in its original sense ie 'a co-operative of people devoted to a particular activity'. No academic qualifications are required and none are awarded.

In the UK, where the **u3a** movement began in March 1982, there are now nearly 1000 **u3as** with approximately half a million enthusiastic members. A typical u3a is 300 strong, with the smallest at 12 members and the largest 3000.

What is the 'Third Age'?

The 'First Age' is education, the 'Second Age' is career and family, the 'Third Age' is retirement, and the 'Fourth Age' is dependency. At present, some 20% of the UK population belongs to the Third Age and for many this may be the longest and most stable phase of their lives. It can also be a time of fulfilment and personal development.

All **u3as** are fully autonomous with members organising their own activities and making their own decisions through their elected representatives. They are self-financing on a non-profit basis with no political or religious allegiance and develop according to the needs and resources of the area.

Members are encouraged to contribute their skills, knowledge and experience to shared learning. Members may have expertise gained during their working lives or because of an interesting hobby, which they are willing to share with others. A member may be a 'learner' in one group and an 'organiser/tutor/leader' of another.

u3a activities cover practical skills, social activities, physical activities and leisure pursuits as well as academic subjects.