



Objects and Principles

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 slightly amended in 1984, and the Aims and Guiding Principles written in 2004, in response to demand for a more modern interpretation.

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 in general, develop a fitter mind and body.

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

Aims and Guiding Principles.

Aims.

1. To encourage and enable older people no longer in fulltime paid employment to help each other to share their knowledge, skills, interests and experience.
2. To demonstrate the benefits and enjoyment to be gained and the new horizons to be discovered in learning throughout life.
3. To celebrate the capabilities and potential of older people and their value to society.
4. To make U3As accessible to all older people.
5. To encourage the establishment of U3As in every part of the country where conditions are suitable and to support and collaborate with them.

Guiding Principles.

U3As are guided by the following principles.

1. Programmes.

- a) U3As offer learning activities which reflect members' wishes and which aim to satisfy the widest possible range of interests: educational, cultural, recreational, physical and social. (Laslett Principles 6,9,14 & 15).
- b) U3As seek resources appropriate to their learning; from their own memberships; from the Trust's national support systems and from outside organisations, both local and national. (Laslett Principle 12).
- c) U3As make use of new technologies as they become available.

2. Purpose, Styles and Methods of Learning.

- a) The pleasure of learning is a driving force in the work of U3As.
- b) U3As neither require nor award any qualifications. (Laslett Principles 2, 8 & 14).
- c) By sharing their learning, U3A members help one another to develop their knowledge, skills and experience. (Laslett Principle 1).
- d) U3As arrange and support their own programmes as appropriate to their chosen learning activities. (Laslett Principle 10).
- e) U3A members regard themselves as both learners and teachers. (Laslett Principles 1 & 7)

3. Funding.

- a) U3As are funded in the main by the subscriptions of their members. Funding from outside sources may be sought on occasions and is accepted only if there are no conditions attached which might conflict with the Trust's aims and guiding principles. (Laslett Principle 3).
- b) Members undertake themselves, without payment, the many and varied tasks necessary to run their U3A. (Laslett Principles 4 & 5).

4. Reaching Out.

- a) U3As take every opportunity to promote the benefits of learning later in life and the attractions and advantages of the U3A way of learning. They make membership available to the whole spectrum of older people in their communities. (Laslett Principles 2 & 8).
- b) U3As keep in touch with members and former members who, for a variety of reasons, can no longer take part fully in U3A activities in order to maintain their interest in learning and to offer friendly support, a fundamental part of U3A life. (Laslett Principles 7).
- c) As appropriate, U3As offer voluntary assistance in learning activities to educational and cultural bodies in their communities. (Laslett Principles 5 & 7).
- d) U3As collaborate with institutions such as museums, galleries, libraries, in learning partnerships in which both U3As and the institutions themselves may benefit through research, advancement of knowledge and mutual respect for capabilities. (Laslett Principles 6, 13 & 14).
- e) U3As engage with local and national government departments and other agencies that formulate lifelong learning policies and practices in order to influence those that relate particularly to learning in later life. (Laslett Principles 12 & 15).
- f) U3As are ready to collaborate with institutions undertaking research into ageing and the position of older people in society. (Laslett Principles 16 and 19).

5. Association.

- a) U3As collaborate with each other to share expertise and facilities and offer systems of support. They may form themselves into regions or neighbourhood associations. (Laslett Principle 18).
- b) U3As work, individually or together, to establish and support new U3As.

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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.

Original 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 as much as possible of 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.

Original 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.

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