How U3A began

It started in France

The Université du Troisième Âge (University of the Third Age) was founded in 1972 at Toulouse University, France. By 1975 the idea had spread to universities across Europe. The original French model required U3As to be associated with traditional university systems.

Their course content and presentation were a mix of open lectures, negotiated access to established university courses, contracted courses, study groups, workshops, excursions and physical health programs.

The British changed it

U3A reached Cambridge in 1981 and they adopted a style which ensured no distinction between the tutors and those being taught. Members could become teachers as well as learners.

The strengths of this self-help approach include: minimal fees; accessible classes run locally; flexible timetables and flexible teaching styles; a variety of courses ranging from the highly academic to arts, crafts, social and physical activities.

Now it is very Australian and "just U3A" to its mates

We have the French to thank for a brilliant idea and the awkward name. Troisième âge (third age) is a term for the years of 'active retirement' that come between working life (second age) and dependent frail old age (fourth age).

Some people are confused by the name or intimidated by the use of 'university'. That is why we are "just U3A" to our friends.

We have the British to thank for the system which works very well in Australia where many of us live a long way from a university and in an era where education has become a user-pays commodity wiping leisure classes off curricula across the country.

Staying active: mentally, physically and socially

Research shows that staying mentally alert, physically active and socially engaged wards off the worst evils of ageing and helps seniors remain living independently in their own homes for longer. This is what makes U3A a first-rate positive ageing organisation.