

Universities for young and old



The university year is about to start in the UK – why not take a tour of some facts and figures? And then discover a university for the young in mind ...

Everyone has heard of Oxford University with its dreaming spires, and Cambridge University with its punts on the River Cam, but did you know that as well as being the best performing UK universities, Oxford and Cambridge are also the oldest, founded in 1167 and 1209 respectively?

St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh all opened in the following 400 years, and just before the First World War, there came the first wave of 'Red Brick' universities, so-called because of their building material: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield. After the war, Exeter, Hull, Leicester, Nottingham, Reading, Southampton and Swansea were added to this list. Then, in the 1960's, 23 universities were founded including the University of East Anglia in Norwich that is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Today there are 163 universities in the UK, and just under two and a half million students, nearly 10% of whom are studying at The Open University (established in 1969) that only offers distance learning. The biggest (traditional) universities in student numbers are Manchester and Leeds Metropolitan, which both have over 41,000 students studying for degrees. There is currently only one fully-fledged private university: the University of Buckingham.

Traditionally, the week before term starts is called Freshers' Week, and gives new students (or Freshers) an opportunity to find their feet, get to know other students and learn more about their departments where they will be studying. There is also plenty of time for some extra-curricular partying before the term starts. These days, students have to dig deep in their pockets to enjoy this new life. Until 1998, university education was free for UK citizens. Then annual tuition fees of £1,000 were introduced, which were increased to a maximum of £3,000 in 2005. In 2012, after many student demonstrations against it, the government announced that universities could introduce tuition fees up to £9,000 - a lot of money for young students.

But university is not just for youngsters. Although some older people attend university as students, there is an association especially for them: The University of the Third Age (or U3A), which was founded in the UK in 1982, so last year it celebrated its 30th anniversary. It developed from an original idea from France, where it is more of an academic model, based at a local university. In the UK, however, the emphasis is on cooperative principles of learning:

U3As are self-help, self-managed lifelong learning co-operatives for older people no longer in full time work, providing opportunities for their members to share learning experiences in a wide range of interest groups and to pursue learning not for qualifications, but for fun. There is a wide regional network of associations offering hundreds of courses led by someone with specialist knowledge, from French to

geology, from creative writing to particle physics. The range of subjects on offer is wide and all the students are there because of the joy of learning. The students in the U3A are on a 'voyage of discovery': there are no formal lecturers, no campus, no buildings, no terms, no exams and no qualifications.

So in October, it won't just be young people getting excited about learning; there will also be thousands of third-agers showing that it is never too late to learn.

If you would like to know more about the University of the Third Age, then click here: <http://www.u3a.org.uk/>.

If you would like to use The University of the Third Age as a topic in your classroom from B1.1 upwards, we have provided you with two activities.

You'll find them in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

Teacher's notes

Activity 1: What is the University of the Third Age (U3A)?

(level B1.1 upwards) (10+ mins)

Copy **What is the University of the Third Age (U3A)?** (see Worksheet) – one for each student.

On the board write the words: *medicine, law, economics, French, politics*. Ask students what these words have in common. (They are popular subjects to study at university.)

Extend the discussion by asking students what they studied, or what their children or friends studied or are still studying at university.

Explain that in the UK (and in other countries, too) there is an association for older students in the third age of their life – a university with no exams, where you simply study for fun. (It is like an informal version of the VHS in Germany.)

Give each student a copy of the text **What is the University of the Third Age (U3A)?** and tell them to choose the correct words.

Check answers together in class.

Key: (1) older (2) work (3) finished (4) stopped (5) want (6) many (7) fun (8) big (9) expensive

Allow a few minutes for discussion about the text.

Activity 2: Which U3A courses would you like to do?

(level B1.1 upwards) (20+mins)

Copy **Which U3A courses would you like to do?** (see Worksheet) – one for each student. (NB: The three texts on the Worksheet are identical.)

Distribute the course information and ask each student to choose the three courses they would like to do. Help with any unknown vocabulary.

Students compare their choices with their partner's choices. Tell them to explain WHY they would like / not like to do a course.

Have a class feedback session, and ask students which are the most popular courses.

Follow-up activity: Organise a U3A lesson. Ask students to bring their knowledge on a special theme or topic to the classroom and share it with the other students.

Worksheet: see next page

Worksheet**Activity 1: What is the University of the Third Age (U3A)?**

Read the text and choose the correct words.

The third age is the later period in life when people have got more free time and the U3A, therefore, is an association for (1) **older | younger** people who are no longer in full-time (2) **work | school**. They've (3) **finished | started** looking after their children and they've (4) **begun | stopped** working 40 hours a week (as people do in their the second age). Perhaps they work part-time, and their children have left home. But they (5) **don't want | want** to learn. At the U3A there are (6) **many | a few** opportunities to learn new skills and to learn for (7) **fun | exams**. There's a (8) **big | small** choice of courses from Arabic to art, from philosophy to Pilates, from science to Spanish literature. It isn't very (9) **cheap | expensive** to join, only £15 a year.

**What is the University of the Third Age (U3A)?**

Read the text and choose the correct words.

The third age is the later period in life when people have got more free time and the U3A, therefore, is an association for (1) **older | younger** people who are no longer in full-time (2) **work | school**. They've (3) **finished | started** looking after their children and they've (4) **begun | stopped** working 40 hours a week (as people do in their the second age). Perhaps they work part-time, and their children have left home. But they (5) **don't want | want** to learn. At the U3A there are (6) **many | a few** opportunities to learn new skills and to learn for (7) **fun | exams**. There's a (8) **big | small** choice of courses from Arabic to art, from philosophy to Pilates, from science to Spanish literature. It isn't very (9) **cheap | expensive** to join, only £15 a year.

**What is the University of the Third Age (U3A)?**

Read the text and choose the correct words.

The third age is the later period in life when people have got more free time and the U3A, therefore, is an association for (1) **older | younger** people who are no longer in full-time (2) **work | school**. They've (3) **finished | started** looking after their children and they've (4) **begun | stopped** working 40 hours a week (as people do in their the second age). Perhaps they work part-time, and their children have left home. But they (5) **don't want | want** to learn. At the U3A there are (6) **many | a few** opportunities to learn new skills and to learn for (7) **fun | exams**. There's a (8) **big | small** choice of courses from Arabic to art, from philosophy to Pilates, from science to Spanish literature. It isn't very (9) **cheap | expensive** to join, only £15 a year.

Activity 2: Which U3A courses would you like to do?

Read the course information and choose three courses you would like to attend.
Compare your choices with your partner's choices.

<p>Italian Art 1400-1600: a practical appreciation. This course looks at certain aspects of art and sculpture from northern and central Italy, generally between the years 1400 and 1600.</p>	<p>Understanding wine and wine tasting. Do you know your Chardonnay from your Merlot? Italian, French, South African wines – what is the difference? We will explain and let you <i>taste</i> the difference.</p>
<p>Can you count to 13? Like playing cards? Like the thrill of an auction? Then maybe Begin Bridge could be for you. We aim to start with the real basics.</p>	<p>Medicine Today. We discuss articles in medical journals: news, controversies, new treatments, problems including ethical questions such as euthanasia.</p>
<p>Join us for today's Bird Watching. Variety of habitats – bring binoculars and walking shoes. We will walk by the river and return through the woods. Please bring a packed lunch.</p>	<p>The Future of Nuclear Energy in the UK - presented by speakers from Électricité de France. Will we be using nuclear energy in the future or can we produce renewable energy?</p>
<p>Digital Photography. Take better pictures: portraits, countryside, flowers, animals. You will learn how to take photographs in poor light, without using flash.</p>	<p>Cosmology: Big Bang? Exploration of thinking about the nature, origin and future of our universe, together with more speculative ideas – such as inflation, dark energy and the multiverse.</p>
<p>An Introduction to British Prehistoric Archaeology. This course will explore the archaeology of Britain in the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods using fascinating evidence to reconstruct the lifestyle of these early people.</p>	<p>Singing for pleasure. We will be singing a variety of music, ranging from classical pieces and popular tunes to spirituals and folk songs from different traditions. Singing is a healthy, relaxing exercise and doing it as part of a group can be very satisfying.</p>
<p>Jane Austen – fact and fiction. This study day is for anyone who loves the novels of Jane Austen. We will discuss 'Pride and Prejudice' and 'Persuasion'. There will be time for questions and discussion.</p>	<p>Current Affairs – Political and Social Studies. The course will explore some of the important issues of the day, for example the EU and the UK, Scottish independence, immigration and public transport.</p>