



# YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD...



*Active minds and active bodies are on the curriculum at the University of the Third Age*

**S**taying active, learning and having fun in your third age are the basic "rules" for anyone involved in the U3A.

Founded in 1981, the UK U3A now has more than 439,000 members in 1,046 groups and the original principles are as true today as they were then – to promote lifelong learning through self-help interest groups sharing knowledge on a wide range of subjects chosen by members.

The Third Age is not about a particular age but more about people who are no longer in full-time employment or raising a family.

At its core are the interest groups formed by the members for the members covering as wide a variety of topics and activities as they wish. Learning is for its own sake with the key theme being enjoyment. Members are encouraged to 'teach' what they are interested in or have knowledge or experience of.

New members are always welcome, especially those with the enthusiasm to share their skills by leading new groups which can range from yoga to art and include bridge, languages, politics and walking to name but a few.

This year the organisation will be celebrating the first national U3A day on 3rd June to celebrate the new experiences that come with being in your third age. The annual event which will take place on the first Wednesday in June, will show

the amazing array of things members get up to and challenge preconceptions of what being an older adult means.

Each group is invited to mark the day however they see fit, perhaps with a display, a parade or for the daring a performance or flashmob. The idea being to showcase what U3A is all about and the diversity it offers.

Regional trustee Sue Stokes is coordinating the day and is excited that this will be the first of such celebrations. She said: "From now on, every year, there will be a day dedicated to learning, staying active and having fun in your Third Age – that's people who are retired, semi-retired or no longer bring up a family.

"We hope this day will help to challenge the



perceptions of older adults and will bring together all Third Agers in the community to learn about the contribution U3A makes to the quality of life for retired people."

*U3A groups across the area have been telling us all about what they can offer and why you should join them, there's bound to be one near you and with the variety of interest groups to choose from you're sure to find one to suit and if not, why not start your own?*

## Abingdon U3A

Abingdon U3A was one of the first U3A groups and has a membership of more than 300 with no waiting list. There is a varied programme of speakers plus a wide variety of interest groups.

Abingdon-on-Thames is one of the few U3As to meet weekly with groups ranging from crafts, music, poetry, swimming, singing and play reading to genealogy, tenpin bowling, learn to jive and French conversation among others. Theatre outings and trips and visits also form part of the programme.

Regular speakers also entertain the group with subjects such as memories of a royal footman in January and the Oxford of *Inspector Morse* among those on the agenda this month.

Annual membership is £20 plus a 50p fee payable at each meeting attended.

We meet on Monday afternoons at Preston Road Community Centre, Midget Close, Abingdon, OX14 5NR, 2-4pm.

The hall in Preston Road has disabled access and is equipped with a hearing loop. There is also an adjacent car park. Refreshments are provided, giving members the chance to socialise. Visitors are always welcome and will be charged 50p at the door.

Our own members provide in-house items at some meetings. Speaker meetings are listed on our events page.

To find out more visit [www.u3asites.org.uk/abingdon/home](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/abingdon/home)

## U3A Thames Valley Network

Ten years ago, U3As across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire joined to form the Thames Valley Network (TVN). The

network has now grown to include 46 member U3As. Representatives from those U3As come together in quarterly meetings where they discuss issues that concern them, swap ideas, advice and information.

Every year we organise several study days, each one centred on a specific subject and bringing together top quality speakers – subjects have included photography, opera, William Morris, first aid, ukulele, polar exploration, social history and workshops to improve the skills of our members. Study days planned for 2020 include the History of the Thames and its boats, cybercrime and biodiversity and climate change, as well as a day to encourage U3As who would like to start quiz groups.

If you would like to know more about the network, and its member U3As, do look at our website at [www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk](http://www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk)

*Avis Furness, Chairman*

## Wallingford U3A

Wallingford U3A was set up in 1985. It rapidly grew too big for its venue and members decided that there was enough support to start a second branch. Thus Wallingford (Thameside) U3A was born.

Thameside, with more than 400 members, has now outgrown its parent. The original branch holds steady at about 120. Many members belong to both.

All branches follow the same basic format: a monthly open meeting with a speaker, and groups where smaller numbers get together to pursue an interest: reading, walking, current affairs, Sunday lunch, theatre, poetry, history, Italian conversation, whatever.

There are also monthly outings and organised holidays. Wallingford U3A is planning five days in the Lake District this summer.

Thameside can offer a greater variety of interest



groups; Wallingford has a 70 per cent turn out to its monthly lectures and is small enough to be very friendly and supportive.

So, who joins? Wallingford still has a couple of founder members, some recent members have just moved into the area, often to be near family, some have just retired and want the buzz of keeping busy. One member said recently: "This U3A has given me new friends, fun and some challenges. It has sparked my life."

*Deirdre Wilson*

### Didcot & District U3A

Didcot & District U3A began with an inaugural meeting in January 2013 and has grown to more than 300 members currently. We hold a monthly meeting where there is a guest speaker; interesting subjects have included Bletchley Park, bomb disposal, soldiers of the English Civil War (in costume), Rapid Response Medical Transport Service, the real *Downton Abbey*, writers, life stories, musical entertainments to name a few. There is always time for a chat and a cup of tea.

We have 38 interest groups ranging from art appreciation to wine appreciation, books to writers, languages to science. They meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly, depending on the wishes of the group members. Each group has a convener, but all members may share in the organisation of the group if they wish to do so.

As part of the Thames Valley Network our members have opportunities to take part in study days across the local area. Topics in the coming months will include the history of the Thames, geology, climate change and understanding historic buildings, among others.

We believe that belonging to U3A helps us to age well. We aim to live up to the U3A strapline – LEARN, LAUGH AND LIVE.

*Shirley Rouse, Chairman*

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the Thames Valley Network (TVN). The network has now grown to include 46 member U3As. If you would like to know more about the network, and its member U3As and to join, look at the website at [www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk](http://www.u3atvnetwork.org.uk)

### Wantage and Grove U3A

Wantage and Grove U3A started more than 35 years ago with just a very few members, we moved into Grove Village Hall in 2008.

Recently increasing numbers meant another move was needed, we now meet twice a month in Grove Parish Church Hall.

At the end of 2019 we had 194 members, an increase of 20 on 2018, so still growing. The average attendance at our bi-monthly meetings ranges from 60 to 95.

As members, people are invited to join as many of our special interest groups (SIGs) as they feel they have the time and/or interest for. These are small groups where we can really get to know each other, they are run by and for members.

We have 19 SIGs, new ones are promised in the New Year, the subjects range from art to walking via German and pub quiz. No expertise or even experience is needed, just a desire to learn from fellow members.

We are a very friendly, sociable group, so do join us, it only costs £20 a year, open to all retired people who want to Learn, Laugh and Live, excellent for mind, body and spirit.

For further information and details on all current activities call **07546 631089** or visit our website at [www.u3asites.org.uk/wantage](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/wantage)

*Hazel Townesend, Membership Secretary*

### Witney U3A

Witney has a thriving U3A with 600 members, who enjoy speaker meetings twice a month and more than 60 interest groups. Witney is just one of more than 1,000 U3As nationally and is open to anybody who is either retired or semi-retired, irrespective of age, nationality or ethnicity. The U3A movement is non-religious and non-political and has three main principles:

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. Members promote the values of

lifelong learning and the positive attributes of belonging to a U3A.

Witney's 60 interest groups cover a wide range of subjects, from antiques to writing, from English country dancing to railways. There is something for everyone and if there isn't, then members are encouraged to start their own particular group! With trips to stately homes, local theatres and interesting venues including The Royal Mint, the Houses of Parliament and the Royal Albert Hall, Witney U3A has something for everyone.

For more information please visit [www.u3asites.org.uk/witney/](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/witney/)

### Woodstock & District U3A

Now into its second decade, Woodstock U3A branch provides a varied programme of events and activities for senior citizens of Woodstock and surrounding villages.

Core of the programme is the series of monthly meetings, each featuring an outside speaker; recent subjects have ranged from art and art history to working for auntie and health and wellbeing. Each monthly meeting also offers an opportunity for socialising over tea and coffee, as do the periodic branch lunches and seasonal parties.

The most varied and characteristic provision is that of our 20-plus interest groups, where smaller numbers gather weekly or monthly to keep up or try out for the first time a wide range of interests. From art through bridge, battles & battlefields, craft, historic buildings. Play reading and recorder playing to science discussion, and walking (ambling, too, for the less hearty) each group pursues its specialism at a pace to suit its members, sometimes inviting outside experts, or undertaking visits to local museums and historic sites.

To find out more, go along as a guest (£2 a head) to a meeting - normally on the first Tuesday of the month, 2pm at Community Centre in New Road, Woodstock or check out the website at [www.u3asites.org.uk/woodstock](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/woodstock)

### Reading U3A

Reading U3A began in 1986 and now has over 600 members. Most of our meetings take place in central Reading, on weekdays, during the day, within easy reach of buses from most parts of town.

We have over 50 interest groups, covering such subjects as music, arts, recreation and health, literature and drama, languages, history, science,

debating and current affairs. On payment of an annual subscription (currently £35) members can take part in as many activities as they wish. Members can suggest ideas for new groups – recently a climate repair group has started, and preparations are being made for a group studying Reading's industrial heritage. There is something to do every day!

We also have social events, such as lunch groups, outings, and a regular coffee morning and quiz, and we organise an annual piano masterclass for young musicians. Our visits to local and West End theatres are very popular. Our physical activities, including walking and ambling groups, Tai Chi, line dancing, seated exercise, yoga and circle dancing, are keeping our bodies active, as well as our minds.

We warmly welcome new members – there is an open meeting, with a speaker, on the fourth Monday of most months, and if you are thinking of joining us this is an ideal opportunity to come along and see for yourself.

Reading U3A's website – [www.readingu3a.org.uk](http://www.readingu3a.org.uk) – is the place to look for more information.

### Woodley & District U3A

Woodley & District U3A only started in June last year but already has a variety of groups for members to enjoy all sharing the same main ideals of the U3A.

Held on the first Wednesday of every month at Christ Church in Crockhamwell Road, Woodley, 2-4pm, these meetings are open to all members enabling them to socialise, sign up for events, and to hear keynote speakers on topics such as local history, Woodley Air Museum, meteorology, money matters and computer cyber safety to name a few. We also welcome suggestions from members about speakers and topics of interest.

Covering a range of interest activities such

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as bridge, discovering science, French conversation, Spanish for beginners, family history, food lovers, creative writing, medical topics in the news, walking with cameras, and run by member volunteers. The groups meet at various venues which may include group members' homes depending on the size of the group.

We welcome ideas and suggestions from members for social events to add to our social events calendar. A number of social events, such as Sunday and mid-week lunches are catered for within activity groups and events such as picnics, treasure hunts and a murder mystery dinner are in the pipeline.

Join us! Come along to one of our monthly meetings or coffee afternoons in Woodley and visit the website at [www.woodleyu3a.org.uk](http://www.woodleyu3a.org.uk)

### Newbury U3A

The U3A is a unique nationwide movement which provides members with life-enhancing and life-changing opportunities. Here in Newbury the U3A will be celebrating its 30-year anniversary next year. Currently we have almost 1,000 members. They enjoy a wide range of interest and activity groups and are able to share social events, outings and holidays both at home and abroad.

We run more than 70 interest groups which vary from active to quite sedentary pursuits and offer the opportunity to learn new skills. Our website at [www.u3asites.org.uk/newbury/home](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/newbury/home) gives details of all our events and non-members are welcome to attend two taster sessions to see exactly how we operate.

The U3A is open to anyone of semi or retirement age – it's a place to learn new things, explore interests and share experiences through which many new friends are made. It is a particularly welcome group for those who live alone or are new to the area, offering the chance to participate in both favourite and new interests with other like-minded people.

I am sure you will find the U3A a very worthwhile and welcoming organisation.

*Rosemarie Franklin, Chairman*

### U3A in Kennet

U3A in Kennet (launched in 1992) is centred on the beautiful, historic market town of Marlborough and surrounding villages in north Wiltshire. The name Kennet is from the river that flows peacefully from its several sources in the chalk downs, and adds interest and charm to the villages on its banks, including Marlborough itself.

Whatever your level of participation, be it energetic or more relaxed, thought-provoking or gentle leisure, developing skills or just chatting, there is something here for you... and if there isn't, the U3A is always keen to start new groups.

For a single membership fee, U3A in Kennet offers more than 65 interest groups ranging from art and art history to wine appreciation.

There are also monthly speakers to be enjoyed with February's coming from Jeff Hide with his "memories of life in the law" where he will share his life in the legal profession.

To find out more or get to know us better, head along to the regular Coffee Exchange in Marlborough, between 10.30am and noon on the last Thursday of each month at Wesley Hall in Oxford Street. The Coffee Exchange is a great opportunity to meet other U3A members, have a chat over coffee, enjoy a thoughtful presentation on local events in Marlborough, and get the latest U3A news. For potential new members, this is the best way to learn if the group is for you.

Find out lots more about the group online at [www.u3ainkennet.org.uk/](http://www.u3ainkennet.org.uk/)

### Wokingham U3A

Wokingham U3A (WU3A), founded in 1990, became a registered charity in 1991. It has grown very rapidly over the years and the current membership is about 2,000.

There are more than 190 groups from which to choose. The groups meet in members' homes or in larger venues in and around Wokingham.

Wokingham offers both educational and recreational groups, including groups for Members On Their Own (MOTO). At Wokingham U3A there's a group for pretty much every interest you can think of – American square dancing, photography, ballet, languages, cycling, geocaching, wine appreciation, technology and so many more.

The group also holds monthly afternoon meetings

on the third Tuesday of the month at 2.30pm at St Paul's Parish Rooms in Wokingham, to which a speaker is invited. These run from September through to May and the entrance fee for this meeting is £2 and includes a cup of tea or coffee and biscuits.

For more information and details of all the groups – you're sure to find one that appeals to you – just visit [www.wokinghamu3a.org.uk](http://www.wokinghamu3a.org.uk)

### Windsor and District U3A

Windsor and District U3A is celebrating the new year with the launch of five fresh interest groups to add to the existing total of 86. During the past 12 years this U3A has built a flourishing membership which now approaches 700 – and new members join nearly every month.

Its groups reflect a wide variety of interests shared by members and most meet monthly or fortnightly. They include nine language groups, five for bridge, music of all varieties, art, current affairs, film, theatre, chess, mah-jong, "boys' toys", a choir and geocaching. For the sports-minded, there is table tennis, walking and cycling.

One novel idea that took off in spectacular fashion was the formation of a group to explore London. After only a few months, more than 120 people had signed up and now several times a week members wave their bus pass and board the 702 to London for a day's outing, plus a pub lunch.

Sue White, Windsor U3A's groups coordinator, said: "Our U3A provides a framework in which older people can be involved in helping to create, join and run many learning-based activities which boost our knowledge and skills, enhance our physical and mental wellbeing and keep us socially connected.

"It is probably at its best when people feel they are meeting up with like-minded friends to share their knowledge of subjects or pastimes they love."

Go to Windsor U3A's website at [www.u3asites.org.uk/windsor/welcome](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/windsor/welcome)

If you're interested in taking your learning further, Oxfordshire Adult Learning provide a wide range of services for learners and local communities. Every year, we run hundreds of part-time and evening courses in community venues and at our main campuses, in subjects such as languages, homecrafts, DIY and lots more. You can also develop new skills or explore courses we offer with our partners as part of the Oxfordshire Learning Network. Discover all this and more at [www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/oxfordshire-adult-learning](http://www.abingdon-witney.ac.uk/oxfordshire-adult-learning)

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