



## How It All Began.....

The birthplace of the University of the Third Age movement was Toulouse, in France. In 1972, Pierre Vellas, Professor of Political Economy, organised a summer school for retired persons. When the school ended, the enthusiasm and determination of the participants were such that, instead of preparing a repeat for the following summer, Vellas was forced to launch another program for the forthcoming academic year. Soon, similar undertakings mushroomed in France and abroad, and the first international colloquium on the new concept was held in Toulouse as early as May 1973.



By early 1975, U3A-type programs were on the way in Belgium, Switzerland, Poland, Italy, Spain, the USA, and Quebec in Canada, and the International Association of Universities of the Third Age (IAUTA) had been founded. Indeed, the French National Association and the IAUTA both adopted the principle that each U3A should have a direct link with a recognised and established university. This was seen as desirable to preserve the credibility of the label 'University'.

## Origin of the U3A in Australia

In July 1984, a public meeting was arranged in Melbourne to gauge community interest in establishing the U3A movement in Australia. It stemmed from a far-sighted initiative by four people with a professional interest in education for mature students: Jack McDonnell, Jill Thompson, Cliff Picton, and Ann Whyte.

Two further public meetings were held, as a result of which the U3A City of Melbourne was formed on 26th July, 1984, and U3A Hawthorn on 13th November, 1984. Two more U3As followed in 1985: U3A Monash (now U3A Waverley) on 12th February and U3A Ringwood, on 26th March.

The very first courses offered at a U3A in Australia were at U3A City of Melbourne, which started in March 1985. The length of the courses depended on the needs of the group and the tutor. The majority of these courses were traditional academic subjects in the Humanities, including Art Appreciation, Clear Thinking, Current Affairs, Australian and European History, Philosophy, Literature, Music/Opera, Languages, Genealogy and Social Science Studies. The U3A received extensive publicity in daily newspapers and radio interviews, and membership in the first U3A grew to 1100 within three years.

Courses also began in U3A Hawthorn in March 1985 with 30 classes, offering subjects such as Art Appreciation, Philosophy, Australian History, Nutrition & Health, Current Affairs, Relaxation, Languages, Marine Biology, Comparative Religion, Car Maintenance, Music Appreciation, Anthropology, Economics, Computers and Social Ethics.

Records indicate that between March 1985 and July 1986, there were 67 general courses. In 1989, eleven of these courses were still operating, and 13 of the original tutors were still teaching. In 1986, the first "Social Forum" was held. This was to develop into the highly popular Saturday Series, a series of lectures by academics and experts in various fields of human endeavour. A further was the Summer School, the first of which was held in 1997 and offered a potpourri of lectures.

In 1988, a report called "The First Four Years" was published, recording the achievements and objectives of that period. Two further four yearly reports have been published. "Learning for Living" in 1989-1992, and "Living and Learning" in 1993- 1996. U3A Hawthorn has grown from the initial membership of 109 in 1985 to over 1100 in 2003, offering 87 full-year courses and 37 short courses.

Courses began at U3A Monash in April 1985. The first newsletter to members in March 1985 announced the commencement of the following classes: Art Appreciation, British History, Computers, Creative Writing, Current Affairs, Current International Affairs, Literature, Eastern Philosophy, Practical Art and Public Speaking. There was also an invitation to interested people to meet to discuss the formation of a group with the somewhat ambitious title "Rational Thinking: The Psychology of Mathematical Lateral Thinking and the Metaphor". Two other possible groups were advertised: "Ageism" and "Japanese Studies". While these proposals indicate the breadth of thinking about the potential of U3A Monash, there is no evidence that these three groups actually eventuated.

The next major event in 1985 was the first general meeting of U3A Monash on 19 August. A report from the Policy Committee from that meeting did not give a figure for current membership but did say that 30 courses had been commenced in the first six months.

The main business of the meeting was described as *"reviewing the operations of U3A Monash to date and considering a document which, for the first time, would set out the aims, guiding principles and organisational details of the group and also to elect such office-bearers and committee members as needed"*. The document referred to was a "Draft Charter" for the U3A. Its adoption was the first step towards the later process of incorporation.

**To delve deeper into the rich history of U3A, we encourage you to explore the attached booklet provided by U3A Queensland. This comprehensive resource traces the organisation's journey from its inception to its current state, offering valuable insights into its growth and evolution.**

[u3a-history Booklet.pdf](#)