History of U3A

The U3A movement had its beginnings in Toulouse, France in 1973. A successful summer school run by the University for retired people, led to the very first Université du Troisième Age. The concept quickly spread throughout France and other European countries and North America. The French model centres around universities, relying heavily on their facilities and tuition, although there are no exams and costs are kept to a minimum.

The first Australian U3A was established in Melbourne in 1984 and quickly caught on in other communities in Australia. In Queensland the first U3As to be formed were Sunshine Coast and Brisbane in 1986.

Australia follows the British model which had been established two years earlier in Cambridge. Rather than relying on traditional universities to provide courses and tutors, members themselves volunteer their skills, knowledge and life experiences to provide classes for other members.

U3As in Australia are autonomous, managed by the members themselves and the only restriction to the curriculum is the expertise available within the community.