

U3A

The University of the Third Age [hence U3A] is a popular activity in most centres in New Zealand, and indeed across the world. In Nelson it is a self-help group of more than 200 retired people who still enjoy learning. Amongst our population there are experts in so many fields and they are often keen to share their knowledge with others. Sometimes there are no experts, but a group gets together and researches a topic.

For example 'Civilisation' meets on the second Wednesday of the month from 10.00 - 12.00, in Richmond. There are about 10 of us and we meet at the Coordinator's house – and start with tea and coffee! Then one of us, who has researched a particular Civilisation, launches into their topic. There may be some basic facts shared then, usually a video on YouTube or a DVD. Then we all discuss the people of that time and wonder at their attainments.

In Nelson we have about 50 different groups (see which have vacancies at <http://www.u3anelson.org.nz/groups/groupstatus.php?acn=current>). Everyone thinks they are in the 'best' group! It is pretty well free too. It costs \$30 to join, which includes refreshments at the bimonthly Open Meetings.

So where does this U3A come from? U3A started in France at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Toulouse in 1973. In France, each Third Age University group is mostly associated with a local university. This academic model is used in many other countries, in particular in continental Europe. But here in NZ, as in many other places each Association stands alone. We in Nelson have our own structure but often have visiting people who are in a U3A group elsewhere. Since U3A began it has spread to over thirty countries and has several million members.

Guiding principles

- There are no teachers and no students – all members are equal
- No qualifications to join – life experience and an enquiring mind are all that is needed
- No passing or failing
- No graduation
- No titles
- No course fees
- No evening meetings
- No shortage of knowledge, skill or experience – members have all that is required
- A modest annual subscription

We are lucky in Nelson to have so many retired people with skills and an interest in continued education. People who visit the website above can look at details about U3A. And newcomers are always welcome.