

It's been quite a journey for this fledgling organisation. Over coffee (or was it wine) the steering committee of four: Diana March, Lyn Harvey, Daina Braddock and Shirley Sims hatched a plan to start a branch of U3A in the Riverland. Little did we know how much was involved in drawing up a Constitution or becoming Incorporated. We merely wanted to unite the region's retired and semi-retired with a "yearning for learning". Passion was the key and nothing seemed insurmountable. We co-opted the assistance of Helen Slade, Jan Slape and Poppy Papageorgiou to the team and engaged the support of the three local councils' Community Liaison Officers.

Clearly, the Riverland was one of the few regions in South Australia without a U3A so our aim was to spread the word about this exciting adult education movement, run entirely by volunteers.

The test was to be the public meeting. After a significant amount of publicity we were overwhelmed by the public response, with approximately 100 people attending. We hadn't anticipated this number and frantically set out many, many more chairs than we thought would be required. It became very apparent that the targeted audience was just as passionate as we were about the social and health benefits of learning something new as we aged.

With the assistance of two very experienced U3A members (Claire and Erica) who had nursed us through the maze of preliminaries, the meeting was abuzz with enthusiasm and energy. 37 people signed up for membership on the spot.

We now have 80 paid-up members ... a wonderful start.

Remember that this is your organisation—it requires your input to function successfully.

*Diana March* (Editor)

**Let me introduce you to your newly-elected committee. You have entrusted them to steer this organisation to meet your needs. They certainly seek your input.**

Chair	Brent Morrell
Vice-Chair	Helen Slade
Treasurer	Shirley Sims
Secretary	Daina Braddock
Publicity/Marketing	Diana March
Course Co-ordinator	Sue Britton
Grants	Tony Guster
Web Master	Terry Marter
General Committee	Pam Rule
	Judy Hennig
	Lyn Harvey
	Marian Woodberry



President Erica Majba, Alliance of U3As in South Australia Inc, addressing people at the public meeting



## Older people may be better learners than we think

<http://theconversation.com>

27 November 2014

Older people may be able to learn more from visual information than their younger counterparts, according to a study published in the journal *Current Biology*.

"The take-home message the study authors gave was that healthy older people are good at learning," said Professor Henry Brodaty, co-Director of the Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing (CHeBA) at UNSW. "They have the same plasticity, but they're not as good at filtering out other information."

The brain needs to be able to easily learn new

information (plasticity), and filter out irrelevant information (stability). The experiment was designed to test whether ageing affects the brain's plasticity, stability, or both.

The researchers had ten 67 to 79-year-olds and ten 19 to 30-year-olds view screens displaying six letters interspersed with two numbers. Each screen also had moving dots in the background, and the participants were asked to report just the numbers.

They found younger people had strong plasticity and stability, meaning only important

information - the numbers - was learnt. The older participants, on the other hand, learnt the numbers but also picked up on the movement of the background dots.

This decrease in stability among the older group means irrelevant information was not being filtered out.

One of the study authors, Professor Takeo Watanabe told *Current Biology* that because the brain's capacity to learn was limited, there was "always the risk that information already stored in the brain may be replaced with new and

less-important information.”

However, Professor Brodaty said the verdict on how the brain stores information was still out.

“There’s debate whether you’ve got a limited filing cabinet, and if you get too much in there you’ve got no room for anything else,” he said. “Many neuropsychologists don’t think there’s a limit, or if there is, we’re nowhere near reaching it.”

Professor Anthony Hannan from the Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health at the University of Melbourne, said the paper did not discuss the implications of the

generational difference in the two age groups.

“One of the most obvious differences between these two groups other than their age is that the younger group would have grown up with screens: playing video games, watching television, using the internet – essentially having perceptual training through their digital environment,” he said.

Whether the older brains naturally decreased in stability, or if filtering visual information was a skill that had not been honed by the study participants is unclear.

“As there were only ten subjects per group, they may not have been entirely representative of their age groups, due to variable genetic and environmental factors,” Professor Hannan added. “There is evidence, for instance, that people who stay more mentally stimulated and physically active can delay onset of cognitive decline.”

Either way, it seems that older people’s ability to learn important visual information is comparable to their younger, screen-savvy counterparts.

## MEMBERSHIP CARD

As a paid-up member of U3A Riverland, you will receive your membership card, with both your name and membership number, attached to a red lanyard. It is important that you produce these when you attend a course or activity as it identifies you as a member. These cards are not transferable.

We would like to acknowledge the support of Print DNA who not only provided the lanyards at cost price, but generously printed the cards at no cost to our U3A

A huge thank you to Ian and his team at Print DNA

## WEB SITE [www.u3ariverland.org](http://www.u3ariverland.org)

Our website will be an increasingly important means of communication for those who have access to the internet. Don’t forget that your local library has computers that you can use and the library staff will assist you to use them.

Our thanks go to Terry Marter who was somewhat badgered into creating an online presence for our U3A. We extend our sincere appreciation for the time he has put into getting this up and running and no doubt for the many hours it will consume in the future.



## Address by Claire from Clare at the public meeting

*Claire Eglinton Secretary, Alliance of U3As in South Australia Inc*

U3A is a volunteer self-help group. Membership is usually restricted to over 50s who are no longer in full time employment. I think becoming eligible for U3A is one of the best things about turning 50

It all started in France in the 1970s. Toulouse University of Social Sciences ran a highly-rated gerontology course exclusively for local retired people. Everyone thought it was such an excellent idea that they formed the UTA: Universite de Troisieme Age (that’s French for University of The Third Age).

What those Frenchmen discovered was something which has sustained the movement ever since. Amongst the seniors in any community are a lot of people with a lifetime of experience and an extensive knowledge about all sorts of subjects. These people were only too pleased to be able to pass this on to other like-minded people. So, instead of academics running the courses, the community itself supplied the tutors from within its own ranks.

The idea was so popular that it spread across Europe and since the 1980s U3A has been growing in popularity throughout Australia.

As a country resident, a long way from city educational and leisure opportunities, I can’t recommend it enough. It has been going in my community in the Clare Valley for 10 years and I think it has transformed how we live our lives.

Research has shown that keeping mentally alert, physically active and socially engaged helps ward off the worst evils of ageing. These can be the key to people staying in their own homes for longer, leading happier and healthier lives.

In SA our motto is **‘Staying active: mentally, physically and socially’** because you need all three for positive ageing.

The name “University of The Third Age” gives us all sorts of problems. People get it confused with New Age and think we are a mob of superannuated hippies (which may be true), or think it pretentious to call it “university”. Third Age is an expression used by social scientists to describe the retirement years. Mankind has four Ages.

**First Age** is childhood where you are dependent on others for your care

**Second Age** is independent adulthood when you are out in the workforce and raising kids

**Third Age** is the years of retirement when you are active and still independent

**Fourth Age** is old age when one is again dependent on others for care

People never used to have a Third Age—those years of being fit and able yet not having to work. They went straight from work to dependent old age, if they lived that long. Now people aim to have as long a Third Age as possible and a correspondingly short Fourth Age. In fact most of us hope to skip that Fourth Age entirely.

A recent report into ageing said: *“Longer lives are the most positive development in the last century of human history. They represent the product of greater prosperity, better diet, disease eradication and healthier lifestyles. They offer each of us, on average, 25 extra years of high quality living with new opportunities for productive work, unprecedented leisure, teaching and learning, and fulfilling relationships with family and friends”*

Thank you for listening so patiently. I wish you all the best in your endeavour to start a Riverland U3A.