

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning**

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Chairman

**Organisation:** U3A, Gawler branch Inc

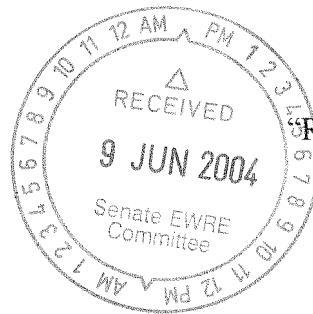
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**Submission to the Senate Committee on  
Employment, Workplace Relations and  
Educational References.**

THE PROGRESS AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF LIFE-LONG LEARNING

From Mr Leslie C. Kemp

I am currently the chairman of U3A Gawler Branch Incorporated an independent branch of the University of the Third Age. The University of the Third Age provides courses of study and other activities for people who are, in the main, retired. The Gawler branch is small. There are 130 members whose ages range from the late fifties to the upper eighties. I am 79. It costs \$15 a year to join U3A Gawler. Membership entitles the member entry to any activity. Presently there are on-going courses in : Writing Your Own Life Story, Embroidery, Bridge, Music Appreciation, Drawing, Tai Chi ( four courses), German( two courses), English History, Creative Writing, Literature Classics on Video, Philosophy and Chair Dancing( not with a chair but sitting on one). There is also a rambling group and each school term there are individual lectures on particular topics. This term we have had lectures on the role of the JP, Gregg shorthand, copper work and dryland farming in Jordan.

In the past few years there has been a lot of talk about life-long learning and a number of initiatives to promote the idea. These seem to have been directed to after-school courses at TAFE and the re-training of workers for employment in new spheres, but life does not stop at retirement and there seems to have been no attempt to promote learning for the over sixties. I address this issue below under the headings of your six particular references.

Reference (a) policies and strategies aimed at addressing the life-long learning needs of an ageing population.

There are few, if any, policies or strategies apparent at present for retired people. U3As manage their own programmes, provide their own educators, devise their own courses, find their own accommodation, pay their own insurance and finance their own activities. Sometimes a grant may be available for a specific programme, but I have yet to find one for rent. There is a great need for the provision of accommodation for such associations as U3A to enable them to have places to house equipment and furniture and give their courses. At present U3As go cap in hand seeking affordable accommodation from schools, colleges, churches and councils. At Gawler, if we had rooms to call our own we could double our offerings and give almost cost-free courses using our unpaid leaders. Imagine a computer course run by a volunteer teacher at no cost using computers recently discarded by government or business and donated to U3A! We could do that at Gawler with teachers waiting in the wings. Accommodation is the key.

Reference (b) the ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning since 1997.

The nature of U3As has been little affected by modern technology. Computer courses have been introduced. The delivery, too, has been little affected although video tapes are more in use for instruction.

Reference (c) the adequacy of any structural and policy changes at Commonwealth and state or territory level which have been made in response to these technological developments. This is easy for U3As. As far as I am aware no government has made any such changes to affect U3As. As they are non-existent, they are totally inadequate.

Reference (d), technological barriers to participation in life-long learning and adult and community education, and the ways and means by which these might be overcome. U3As are able to by-pass modern technology and still be effective. There are many people amongst our members who are frightened to use modern gadgets – computers, ATMs., digital TV, mobile phones. E-mail and the Internet are not part of their lives. Some members could move into the modern world by taking suitable courses – at TAFE, for example – but the cost of such courses is often beyond the capacity of their pensioner purse. *Individual* grants for the over-sixtyfives to pay for such courses should be available. Fortunately, the human being can still talk. Talk and chalk solve many problems in our task of promoting life-long learning.

Reference(d), the extent to which the training, professional development and role of adult educators has kept pace with or been influenced by technological and on-line developments since 1997. As far as I am aware no government has given any thought to U3A educators. They come in many varieties and they give their time free of any charge. They are performing a task which may save the nation millions of dollars in health costs by helping a segment of the community to remain mentally and physically active. Free courses should be readily available to them at local centres. Transport costs should also be defrayed.

Reference(f), re-training strategies as an element in life-long learning, especially for those living in rural and regional areas. This reference does not affect U3As but it is worth noting that life-long learning has more to do with education than with training. The two are poles apart. When a redundant bank clerk has been re-trained as a plumber, he will have learned new skills. He may have advanced his overall education very little.

I hope that the committee will not confine its deliberations to life-long learning only as it applies to the work force. Life goes on for a long time after retirement for many people and the committee should move outside its very restricted terms of reference to consider what should be done, not only to keep retirees mentally and physically active but also to develop activities in community development in which retirees can take an active part.

*L. C. Kemp.*

L.C.Kemp. 5.6.2004.