

# 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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**Submission no:** 9

**Received:** 11/06/2004

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## UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE ADELAIDE, INC.

This submission addresses point (a) of the Committee's terms of reference.

As noted on pages 105-107 of the Senate Committee report "Beyond Cinderella" (1997) the University of the Third Age (U3A) is a self-help adult education movement for people in or approaching retirement - "the third age".

It is an entirely independent, self-funded and self governing body, staffed entirely by volunteers - volunteer tutors, volunteer administrators and a democratically elected Board of management, all in an honorary capacity. With minor exceptions its courses are offered free-of-charge, the cost to members being an annual membership fee. For lifelong learning it is an affordable alternative for those who cannot afford, or do not want the formality of, fee-paying courses offered by tertiary institutions.

The U3A courses cover a wide range of the humanities and sciences including languages, literature, history, current affairs, performing and graphic arts, Yoga etc. In the Adelaide U3A we offer over 120 courses a year to a membership of about 800. The scope of courses offered is governed by the wishes of members, the availability of course leaders and, increasingly, the limitations of our accommodation.

Many suburban branches of U3A have the benefit of low-cost, or no cost, premises provided by Local Government and shared with other community groups, and particularly convenient for people with their own transport. To fulfil our role as the central branch in Adelaide, accessible to all, we need to be in a central location at the hub of public transport routes and in a building with appropriate facilities for the frail and handicapped. We do not have the option of low-cost accommodation.

Rent is 70% of our total operating cost. To keep up with demand we have had to enlarge our premises and in the process have been obliged to more than double our membership fee in the last five years. This has been too much for some members and prospective members. At present we are managing because we were able to negotiate favourable lease terms when the office market was depressed. We are concerned that at the end of the current lease we may be put in a position where we have to raise membership fees beyond the level that people are prepared to pay.

In the first few years of Adelaide U3A (1986-88) some teaching space was made available by the University of Adelaide, but as university undergraduate enrolments increased this help was not available. Our courses are held during the day and this is obviously when there is greatest demand for teaching space in all the S.A. universities. We have sought assistance from the South Australian Government for rent subsidy, without success. S.A. government grants in aid of Adult Community Education concentrate on teaching costs and advertising costs. The Adelaide City Council has been unable to offer accommodation.

The U3A is very important to its members, offering a lifeline to people as they age ( and begin to lose their friends), helping them to keep active, offering them learning sometimes for the sheer joy of learning and the social contact, but also learning to help them in their life's circumstances.

We submit that this is a very worthwhile activity which in catering for the needs of the ageing takes some of the strain off the public purse, and that it would be appropriate for government to provide a rent subsidy, or some other form of accommodation assistance, to enable the U3A to continue to meet the needs of those who are dependant on a centrally-located facility, and hopefully to make the facility available to more people in their third age.

It could be done at quite a low cost – for example a 50% subsidy of our rent (over \$30,000 p.a.) would cost the government about \$20 per annum per person assisted in this way.

Jack Cross

7/6/2004