

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

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

Submission no: 10

Received: 14/06/2004

Submitter: Mr Les Betts
Hon. Secretary

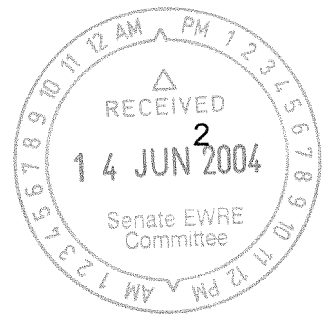
Organisation: University of the Third Age Knox Inc

Address: 71 Harley Street
NORTH KNOXFIELD VIC 3080

Phone: 03 9763 5242

Fax:

Email: marbet@optusnet.com.au



U3A KNOX Inc (University of the Third Age Knox Inc)

U3A Knox Inc is one element of an Australia wide organisation. It is a totally voluntary organisation with a present membership of over 800 persons. All are retired, semi-retired or senior persons.

This group is one of some 60 odd similar groups in Victoria, which attempt to address the concept of 'life long learning', as it can be applied to the retired and senior sector of the population and as a community orientated effort.

The Mission Statement of U3A Knox Inc, in common with most other U3A groups, includes as its major emphasis the promulgation and support of 'life long learning'.

As an organisation it actively practices this in its ongoing and increasing provision of learning activities for an increasing number of retired and senior persons in the Knox municipality in Victoria. We would draw your attention to this organisation's motto on this letterhead.

"Retired from Earning; Not from Learning"

In this submission all that is offered refers to U3A Knox Inc but the experiences and conditions encountered are a reflection of the experiences of all other U3A groups.

As we have indicated, this organisation is in the 'business' of interpreting and extending the concept of life long learning into direct interaction with and for senior citizens. It has been active in the development and continuance of the concept for over ten years within the municipality of Knox City in Victoria.

The reward obtained and shared by all participants is the successful operation of programmes, the continued growth of the group, the opportunity to continue or initiate the study of a subject of ones choice in a non-competitive and supportive environment and the development of a healthy, enjoyable, constructive retirement period. Fiscal considerations extend only to extent of imposing a membership fee adequate to covering of operating costs. The PROFIT obtained is as indicated above.

It is now quite clear that the continuance of physical activity combined with continued mental stimulation into senior years is beneficial not only to the participant in the maintenance of an extended period of good health but also to the community generally, reflected of course as less community expenditure on seniors orientated health programmes.

While this organisation accepts that numerous programmes have been and are presently set up to give expression to the concept of Life Long Learning it is very evident that all such programmes offer little or no support for continued learning to the senior sector of the community.

For these reasons, this organisation is particularly cheered by the fact that an inquiry has been set up to address the full ramifications of the 'Life Long Learning' concept.

This inquiry hopefully, will lead to positive actions for the future development of the 'Life Long Learning' concept with programmes that have real relevance to senior citizens.

We respectfully make the following submissions.

That an expectancy to access programmes of 'life long learning' applies no less to seniors than to active members of the work force.

That programmes aimed to encourage the development of new and the support of existing programmes specifically set up to provide continuing learning opportunities for the senior sector should be an integrated part of any 'life long learning' programme initiated by the government.

That appropriate government departments should conduct meaningful discussions with organisations such as U3As and other NGOs that have been set up specifically to address this neglected aspect of life long learning.

On behalf of U3A Knox Inc

**Les Betts
Hon. Secretary**

Appendix A

Excerpt from a recent issue of 'Florey' (Official Newsletter of The Florey Institute)

Over recent weeks, I have had the pleasure of talking to three different branches of the University of the Third Age — Knox, Waverley and Casey. This is part of the Floreys 'Maintain Your Brain' program that runs seminars on brain and mind disorders for community groups. The topic I was asked to address was Brain and mind disorders: new hope from advances in neuroscience. This generated great interest from the audience of intelligent, motivated retirees, who were eager to learn about advances in neuroscience. Many had direct experience of brain disorders from their own families or friends, ranging from dementia, stroke, Parkinson's disease, MS depression, addiction and schizophrenia, to name a few. They were excited to hear about recent, dramatic advances in understanding the cause of Alzheimers disease arising from the work of Professor Cohn Masters from the University of Melbourne and Konrad Reyreuther in Germany, and how this understanding is likely to translate into new treatments or prevention, perhaps as early as the next decade. Our discussions ranged from the human genome project, the plasticity of nerve cell connections in the brain (synapses), advances in neuroimaging and neurodegenerative disorders.

The people attending these seminars are excellent examples of how continued mental and social activity may help to maintain brain function. Indeed we now have evidence from studies of inherited -neurodegenerative disease that this is true. The Floreys Dr Anthony Hannan has shown that environmental enrichment can markedly delay the deleterious effects of an inherited mutation that causes Huntingtons disease in a strain of mice. The old adage 'use it or lose it' seems to be right.

It is extremely heartening to learn that many people are interested in our work. In the community there is strong support for basic research that aims to understand the causes of brain disorders as a basis of devising better and improved treatments, and ultimately prevention of these crippling conditions.

Maintain your brain

The Howard Florey Institute has developed the 'Maintain Your Brain' program for community groups throughout Melbourne to raise awareness of debilitating brain and mind disorders. Currently being offered to the University of the Third Age (U3A), which is a self-education movement for people in retirement, the program hopes to inform people about brain and mind disorders affecting our ageing population and tell them about the valuable research being undertaken at the Florey

The Florey's Director Professor Frederick Mendelsohn, and Deputy Director Professor Malcolm Home. will be visiting U3A branches throughout the year.