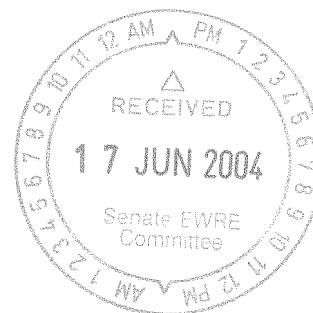


Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee



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

Submitter: Sandra Dart

Organisation:

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY ON LIFELONG LEARNING

I would like to make the following submission to this inquiry based on my opinions and experiences as:

- A degree qualified adult educator graduating 2 years ago and near completion of a Masters degree by research in adult education.
- A 51 year old rural woman who has worked in 4 different career streams in order to accommodate and support the needs of a growing family and has used training to support each of these changes in the last 20 years.
- A vocational teacher who has worked with students from school age to retired.

Points of submission:

- (a) Many adults wish to keep working and enjoy learning into later life, but are not supported financially as youth are for training. Many adults have no income while trying to retrain and still have to support a family. While all adults acknowledge that training is an important component when they need to gain employment, the majority will say that an older person presenting for job interviews will be considered 'over qualified'. There needs to be a rethinking of the capabilities of older people by employers who often think that their business needs a young image to compete in the market. This is also true for employment agencies that are financially rewarded for gaining employment outcomes for youth. Most adults that I've worked with will no longer go to an employment agency as the agency will only present young, possibly under qualified people to employers saying that employers only want young people who will give returns for their investment. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that many young people are not interested in a career in one workplace, are more mobile and are more unreliable.
- (b) Nearly all older adults that I've trained will not use the internet for training in preference to the social interaction of the class and the face-to-face communication with the teacher. For rural people the internet for online delivery just enhances their feelings of isolation and disconnectedness. In one year of classes, I would have had 20 people each month in the classroom and only 2 online for the year. This ties in with (d); the push for technological participation is one way direction from administrators and online learning is not preferred by most adult students. Adult education has always been a social experience, a way of networking with interaction in a positive and supportive environment.
- (e) Introduce strategies that at least make an older adult feel that they belong in a rural place of learning. The primary focus at my local rural TAFE is youth. The loud bands playing everyday, the posters everywhere on aids, suicide prevention, gay and lesbian support, family planning and drug and alcohol abuse contribute greatly to the feeling of alienation for older adults. They feel like they are on another planet. In some cases the youth student population can be quite threatening to older people who go to check out the facilities and courses available for the first time and will not go back. Universities now have mature age student support and activities groups, it's time TAFE did the same. Youth have literacy and numeracy support personnel on campus alongside counselling. Older adults should have computer literacy support personnel alongside qualified aged counselling.

Lastly, lifelong learning is not always about employment, but if adults are expected to work longer now it must be a two-pronged approach. First, financially and socially support learning for older adults differently from youth. They are not the same and their needs are not the same. Second, an awareness campaign for employers and employment agencies that this 'over qualified' excuse is fooling no one. I am seeing more and more adults with good professional qualifications moving around the state doing seasonal work in order to support their families because there is little work in rural areas. They could find work in the city but cannot afford housing. Older adults are not ready to roll over quietly into retirement mode, especially those who do not have sufficient superannuation to do

so, and still want active workforce participation using a wealth of knowledge and an active intelligent brain. I'm one of them.