

Postal address
PO Box 10-364
Wellington 6143
Ph 04 473 1510



Level 1
Anvil House
138-140 Wakefield St
Wellington

wellingtonseniornet@gmail.com

seniornetwgtn.blogspot.com

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New Zealand Productivity Commission
PO Box 8036
The Terrace
Wellington 6143

This letter is responding to the Invitation by the Productivity Commission to respond to the Issues Paper 'New Models of Tertiary Education'.

SeniorNet Wellington has noted the following description in the Issues Paper that Adult and Community Education (ACE) '*enables adults to engage in education with few barriers to participation and in a context relevant to the learner. It usually does not lead to a qualification and is often focused on personal development and skill enhancement with associated social, civic and community benefits, including literacy and numeracy skills*'.

The mission and objectives for SeniorNet Wellington as set out below have a similar intent.

“MISSION

To foster opportunities for older adults to embrace and keep pace with emerging technologies that will not only enrich their lives but also enable them to effectively and efficiently share their knowledge and wisdom in the community.”

“OBJECTIVES

The objects of the Society, which are limited to New Zealand, are as follows:

- to teach computer skills and related forms of technology to older adults in an enjoyable and friendly way;
- to give older adults the opportunity, and encourage them, to learn and share skills in technology that will enable them to contribute their knowledge and wisdom to society;
- to offer a means for older adults to communicate and make friends through on-line communication
- to do all such things as may be deemed necessary to attain and complement the Mission of SeniorNet Wellington and the above objectives.”

SeniorNet Wellington has a membership of over 700 senior citizens. Most are over the age of 60 and many of these are well into their 70s and 80s. They join SeniorNet to learn about many facets that computer technology and the internet offer. There are about 80 other SeniorNet organisations around the country.

Most people can expect to spend at least a third of their life in retirement or semi-retirement. As people age it is important that they are able to participate in society whether it is in the workforce, voluntary service or at home with online access. As older people are significant players in the total economy it is essential they possess a lifelong curiosity to learning – just to keep pace with and contribute to the society for which they belong. There are also health benefits of longevity of those using technology and consequently keeping out of an overburdened health system as well as benefits of family communication.

It is therefore a shame that the Issue Paper does not seem to give much emphasis to the inclusion of older adults, outside the workforce for future tertiary education. The proportion of older people in society is increasing and as people live longer they need to keep learning to:-

- maintain a meaningful role in the community
- retain independence and individual well-being

- access government, community and commercial agencies and communicate effectively with them

As rapid changes in technology occur it is virtually essential that older people have access to electronic technology and the ability and confidence to use it. For example, use of online facilities with government agencies, banking transactions, internet and email access are just a few technologies that are now an essential part of everyday life.

Older people do not need to enrol with universities to keep pace with changing technology. Nor do they wish to participate in formal education with end result qualifications. Generally their main desire for learning is a level that fits within their comfort zone that leads to confidence and practical success of accomplishing new skills. This can be achieved in a social and friendly environment a role that SeniorNet has successfully achieved for many years.

Unfortunately the benefit of lifelong learning as it applies to the learning needs for senior citizens has not been given special mention or priority in the Tertiary Education Strategy 2014/19 even though SeniorNet Wellington made submissions on this aspect. A copy of this submission is attached.

SeniorNet Wellington trusts this submission and the attached document will lead the Productivity Commission to research and include greater emphasis on future benefits of tertiary education for older people.

Yours sincerely



Colin Archer
Chairman
SeniorNet Wellington
Home Phone 04 478 6559
Home Email ColinArcher@xtra.co.nz