

Draft ERA statement

ACTIVE AGEING PROJECT – Learners market

In the market for new learning opportunities

Access to ongoing learning is a major priority for older people around Australia, but opportunities are increasingly limited with many courses over-subscribed, too few resources, lack of accessibility and inadequate funding.

The Eastern Regional Alliance of councils in Adelaide is hoping to change all that by proposing a new Learners' Market that creates a new style of modern learning for older people that could become a model for "third age" learning around Australia.

The Learners' Market will take the self-organising strategies that have been so effective in online social networking and adapt them to a community-based group learning structure. Similar organisations already established in countries such as the UK have enjoyed wide success.

While the informal and semi-formal learning opportunities traditionally delivered through the University of the Third Age and through community centres have been warmly welcomed by our communities, they cannot keep up with demand, they're not available in enough places, and there's no reliable stream of government funding.

ERA's Ageing Strategies project team believes a new business model is now required that will address the shortage of informal learning opportunities across the ERA region that fits the goals and aspirations of local residents and reflects their high level of online access.

It would create self-organised distributed networks of learners and teachers who could come together in homes, cafes, libraries and community centres to exchange and share skills, knowledge and interests.

The ERA, which comprises six councils with a total population of around 290,000 and annual operating expenditure of around \$220 million, would facilitate the process by setting up booking systems for venue use, promotion and information exchange that can be adapted by individuals and groups.

Ultimately, the Learners' Market could be a membership-based organisation using an information exchange register that enables people with skills and knowledge they wish to share to connect with those who wish to learn particular skills, knowledge and experiences..

Members would be free to barter, sell or volunteer their skills and time as they chose, depending on the level of interest from potential students in the "learning market".

The Ageing Strategies project team sees this as a simple and logical model for addressing the shortage of informal learning opportunities across Australia as a whole, and one that reflects the high level of online access common to many communities around the nation.

Importantly, too, it is consistent with the recommendations of the Commonwealth Government's Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians, which is looking for ways for Australia to best harness the life experiences and intellectual capital of senior Australians.