

**SUS0007**

Lifelong Learning Inquiry

Inquiry into the future for lifelong learning: call for evidence on lifelong learning, and sustainable development

Dear Sir,

I have discussed with First Taste's Chairman, Shirley Davison, your email dated 26/6/08 re call for evidence re the above.

We feel that as we have only just completed this paper which was our response to the Government's call for responses to their Consultation Document re Adult Informal Learning – Shaping the Way Ahead and that as we are only a very small Charity with limited resources, all we can do is offer you a copy of our response to that Consultation.

No doubt you will contact us further if you require further information / clarification etc.

Iris Wagstaffe,

Trustee & Voluntary Secretary,  
First Taste  
8 July, 2008

**First Taste**

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**FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE DIUS CONSULTATION ON INFORMAL ADULT  
LEARNING**

**From Shirley Davison  
Chairman  
First Taste**

**9 June 2008**

First Taste is an Arts Education Charity providing stimulating learning activities for people in care homes and day centres.

On listening to discussions and reading the Government's consultation paper concerning informal adult learning, we are concerned that there is little or no mention of the silent and often neglected group of 4<sup>th</sup> Agers living in residential homes or attending day centres. Their numbers are growing as our lifespan increases but their quality of life is often poor.

Our charity, which, we have reason to believe, is unique in the UK, has for around 12 years been providing regular stimulating activities to this group in the Derbyshire Dales, using music, the arts and reminiscence. The benefits are many and are well recorded. We employ professional tutors, assessors and programme managers, though all our trustees and administrators are volunteers.

We receive no funding from statutory bodies, except a small grant from Derbyshire County Council for our work in day centres and occasional grants and support from local councils.

Most of our funding has been from the Arts Council, the lottery and other charities interested in our work with older people. We have been tireless over the years in our search for finances and publicity for our cause!

We are coming to the end of the 1st year of a 2-year project (TOPIC – Tutoring Older People in Care), funded by the Arts Council and the Esme Fairburn Foundation. This provides regular courses in 14 homes and for the first time we have included the training of care workers (another neglected, ill-paid and often unskilled group). This has been well-received and led to rewarding stimulation for both residents and staff.

We have also included sessions involving staff and students from the local comprehensive school's arts and drama groups. These have been well received by everyone concerned.

Once this programme is finished in July 2009, we have nowhere else to go. Funding has dried up and it looks as if the structure we have built up will simply disappear. We have tried to interest Derbyshire County Council but to no avail.

Everyone who hears about us wants us to come and work in their area. We don't of course have the resources. We offer a prototype and advice but no-one wants the work.

We would like the Government to acknowledge that there is a huge untapped area of need among very elderly people in care homes or trapped by infirmity in their own homes and relying on weekly visits to a day centre for stimulation and companionship.

Not many people have occasion to visit care homes. When they do, they are often shocked. Physical needs are, for the most part, met, though medication is often over-prescribed.

But the lack of any kind of stimulation is glaringly obvious. Such a shame, when we know the many advantages such a strategy can produce for everyone concerned.

Where do we go from here and what will the future role be for government and hard-pressed charities like ours?

We believe a society is rightly judged by the way it treats and cares for its vulnerable elderly members. In an ideal world their intellectual, as well as their physical needs would be met, but maybe there is some way we can move towards this in the short term. First Taste has a good proven structure to pass on to whoever is willing to listen and do the groundwork in their area – or better still, nationally!

**Shirley Davison**  
**Chairman**

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**Responses from two of our Trustees, Julie Marshall and Jane Brook, and from our Secretary and Trustee, Iris Wagstaffe, all of whom have read the consultation paper.**

Firstly, education is about the development of the whole person and their understanding of and response to the world they live in, from cradle to grave. It concerns the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, artistic, aesthetic, physical aspects of the individuals as well as their sense of rhythm, harmony etc. etc. training for a job can involve aspects of education but is not education in its fullest sense. From birth, our education comes from those who care for us and their stimulation and response which develops our understanding, our language, our manual and physical dexterity and our curiosity so that we can make full use of the next

stage of state organised education. This, however, should not be expected to negate the need for stimulation and development in many fields outside school/college hours. Some of this is obtained through group/family interaction, some through IT, organisations, sports, TV, travel etc. and these aspects continue through life alongside jobs, careers, work-related learning. As long as individuals can make and fulfil choices, this education in its fullest sense can and does continue.

Our concerns, however, are for the sector of society whose choices are rapidly diminishing. They decrease because of physical restrictions, medical restrictions, innumerable age-related problems. They are cared for in Care Homes and Nursing Homes. Most could not access IT, let alone attend organisations, travel, etc. they may be wheelchair or bed-bound and can interact only when someone comes to them or they are taken to a group. They might not be able to reach a group in the next room unless someone comes to take them. The choice is no longer theirs. Yet, we know from experience, they have a hunger for many aspects of education and regard what we do very highly. We have been providing education which is not only for them but possibly, more importantly, because of the repercussions for their carers, so that they can interact in a more positive and fulfilling way.

### **Julie Marshall & Jane Brook - Trustees**

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The document really does not deal with the very special needs of our client group, i.e. the 4<sup>th</sup> Agers in Care Settings (i.e. residential care, nursing homes or attending day centres):

- a) it would be physically difficult with their mobility/access needs to get them to external centres for learning opportunities;
- b) the courses in traditional centres, e.g. schools, village or church halls would in the main be inappropriate for their special needs. Programmes of learning opportunities for them have to be constructed, (both content and duration) to take account of a range of special needs (both physical and/or mental incapacities).

We know from our independent evaluator's research that First Taste's work is unique in that we have continually endeavoured to access funds (through a huge range of funders) to allow ongoing programmes, not just one-off sessions or a single programme of workshops.

Whilst we might only operate within the geographical area of the Derbyshire Dales (the stated area of benefice within our Charitable registration), our aim is that such provisions should be available to all older people in such settings wherever they live in the Country. That is why our current TOPIC (Tutoring Older People in Care) Project has as one of its outcomes the production of a model of practice for such programmes of learning in such environments so that they could be embedded within any type of care setting. Thus assisting a known national desire to improve and enhance the quality of care provided to frail older people in homes and day centres.

We accept that there are limited resources available but we feel now is an appropriate time for a radical re-think of lifelong learning / adult education provision. It seems the present model has really just been a continuation of provisions that have just grown from Victorian times and trying to address early 20<sup>th</sup> Century needs.

Organisations like the WEA and the U3A, who do a really splendid job, and have the structures to take on board and develop the mainly cultural hobby type classes e.g. yoga, Pilates, painting, history, languages etc. are for those who can readily access such provisions for themselves. After all, everyone who visits a cinema, theatre, plays darts, billiards or hires or downloads films via the internet etc. is well aware of the costs involved and readily pays for that provision – and therefore will be ready and willing to pay for classes run by those organisations so that they continue to be self-supporting. Public monies are best directed to those with known special needs or who are excluded from the usual

participation process, i.e. those who need special help to gain skills to assist their employability, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those with sensory / physical impairment and frail older people in care settings / attending day centres or who through age and infirmity cannot access or benefit from provisions available to the wider community.

First Taste has a wealth of experience after 12 years working in the field of frail older people in care settings with evaluations from May of its past project.

The present TOPIC Project is special in that it reaches out not only to the older people in these settings but is endeavouring to help the development of the holistic skills of the care staff. The Project is being professionally managed and is being tracked by our independent evaluator who will produce both yearly reports and a complete report when the programme finishes in summer 2009. A model of practice will also be produced to allow this type of initiative to be taken forward by mandatory services.

**Iris Wagstaffe**  
**Secretary and Trustee**