



## EFOS Manifesto

### Third Age Education - *Lifelong Learning*

Throughout Europe in the next two decades demographic change will become increasingly rapid. And with this social, economic and educational structures, conditions and challenges will also change. Such change also impacts on the concept of lifelong learning to which the European Federation of Older Students (EFOS) is dedicated.

Lifelong learning in all phases of human life is vital for a society based on learning. Success in the active management of demographic change depends essentially on the degree to which the abilities, competencies, strengths and experience of the senior generations are utilised within society. For this to happen there will be a need for citizens from all levels of society to be socially engaged through lifelong learning. To achieve this will require the development of realistic and differentiated views of old age. These are still “often [...] based on the perceptions of past generations”<sup>1</sup>, and frequently do not recognise the complex nature of old age and thus impede self-development of the elderly. Because many who are retired want to continue to participate in social activity and play an active role in shaping their activity<sup>2</sup>, a correction in attitudes to questions of third age education is required, both with respect to the general and vocational continued education of older employees and also with respect to the educational offerings available to those in “genuine retirement”.

The competence, creativity, innovative strength of those even beyond middle age are indispensable and must be preserved in the interest of the individuals themselves, future generations and demographic challenges. In this context older people can make a significant contribution to the development and communication of an awareness which extends beyond generations and national borders.

Lifelong learning is necessary in every strata and at all age levels of the population. Therefore continued learning at all educational levels is a vital necessity, including older people. ***A well functioning democracy requires well-educated and informed citizens of all ages!***

#### Appeal to Policymakers

For democracy in Europe to function, as well as to preserve and develop the ability to innovate, to achieve economic growth and generally meet future challenges and accomplish future goals of society, policymakers must not merely recognise “education as a right and duty for all ages”<sup>3</sup>, but above and beyond this they must

- create structures which provide older people with equal and unhindered access to diverse opportunities for high class continuing education.
- pass national laws which guarantee the establishment and continued financial support for appropriate educational institutions (in particular universities and colleges) and ensure seniors

---

<sup>1</sup> Friebe, Jens/ Melanie J. Tröller: Weiterbildung in einer alternden deutschen Gesellschaft. Bestandsaufnahme der demografischen Entwicklungen, des Lernens im höheren Lebensalter und der Perspektiven für die Weiterbildung. <http://www.die-bonn.de/publikationen/online-texte/index.asp> 2008, S. IV.

<sup>2</sup> Comp.. ibid., S. V.

<sup>3</sup> In: Sechster Altenbericht. In: ibid., S. VI.

an equal role in the shaping of educational policy, as well as initiating multi-source financing of third age education as an integral part of a policy for the generations.

- promote a Europe-wide inter-generational comparison of educational activities, habits, necessities and interests at all stages of life.

### **Appeal to Universities**

The institutions of higher education in particular are places of lifelong learning, in which people of all ages can learn and ensure that their knowledge is consistent with the latest research findings. Hence they have a particularly important role in meeting the challenges of the future.

In the current development of higher education, providing education which caters to all generations means offering continuing education which is both vocational and of general social relevance. This requirement must become the guiding principle of the institutions of higher education.

In order to provide education consistent with this principle, higher education institutions should direct their research at the culture of the European society and at a new socially significant culture of ageing. The goal is the formulation of a new concept of ageing and old age.

In this context institutions of higher education must offer programmes targeted at older people which focus on the cognitive and emotional interests and motivations of their target groups, including motivations relevant to personal development and self-fulfilment.

### **Appeal to Older People**

In the context of specific third age education the empowerment and expertise of older people are important factors. These imply self-determination, the ability and the freedom to assume self-responsibility, to formulate one's own ideas, to make decisions and to play an active role in policy making at all levels.

For these reasons, it is necessary:

- To actively participate in the programmes offered to older people by institutions of higher education and thus give these courses additional content and depth, to participate actively in devising these programmes, to make suggestions and to seek dialogue with young students without dominating the discussion.
- To engage actively in the preservation and further development of third age studies and to show that third age learning fulfils real needs and interests. To achieve this the work of organisations and student bodies must be supported and individual networks created which will raise public awareness of third age learning. This will make clear the positive effects on personal well-being and on the needs and future development of society.
- To initiate and expand participation in networks, conferences, symposia and projects. Contacts enrich life. Contacts with third age students in other (European) countries through international organisations such as EFOS and participation in international projects (e.g. as part of the EU Grundtvig Programme) contributes significantly to cultural exchanges between students and countries as well as to better mutual understanding.

Sharing the acquired knowledge and experience with the rest of society will illustrate in exemplary fashion the value and effects of broad third age learning as a necessary part of the future development of society.

19 July 2012