

36th Meeting of the Elderly Commission **Summary for Press Briefing**

The Elderly Commission (EC) held its 36th meeting today (17 February 2004) with the following items on the agenda: -

(1) Briefing on the 2004 Policy Address

- The Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food briefed members on his policy agenda for 2004, with particular emphasis on his vision regarding social investment and building social capital.

(2) Visit to Universities of the Third Age (U3A) in Australia

Background

- In connection with EC's work to promote active ageing in Hong Kong, three EC members, namely Mr Peter Wong, Prof Alfred Chan and Ms Anita Wong, joined a study visit on University of Third Age (U3A) in Brisbane & Melbourne, Australia organized by Hong Kong Council of Social Service from 1 to 5 December 2003 to learn how lifelong learning for older persons can be better promoted in Hong Kong. They submitted a report to EC presenting their initial views and feedback.

Structures of Australian U3A

- Australian U3A, unlike a traditional university, is a place for older persons who are interested in learning to have free interaction with others.
- Australian U3As are mostly formed by older persons themselves. At the beginning, a group of older persons interested in developing a U3A in their area would set up a steering committee to do the logistics, as well as prepare to run some courses. They build up a gradual membership, and develop a Management Committee which oversees the development of the U3A.
- There is a high volunteer element in Australian U3A. Management Committee members and tutors, who mostly comprise retired professionals, provide free service. The members also use their network to mobilize friends, neighbours, relatives etc. to participate and assist in the program. Often, there is a good working relationship between a university and a U3A through staff or former staff being involved.
- Australian U3A operate with minimal direct Government funding. Its income is mainly from membership fee which is modest, and only nominal charges are made for certain courses. They make use of volunteers and other community resources such as schools, church halls to keep expenses right down.

- Most courses are interest based, with great variety and in small groups of 10-15 people. There are normally no entry and exit tests or examinations.

Way Forward

- Members noted the initial report. Further discussions will be followed up by the Task Group on Active Ageing and its sub-group on lifelong learning.

(3) Update on Revamping of the Elderly Commission Web Site and Related Measures to Enhance Transparency

- Members were briefed on the progress on the proposed revamping of the existing EC web site and the related measures to enhance EC's transparency.
- The objective of the revamping exercise is to enhance the contents of the web site, and make it more user-friendly.
- The opportunity is also taken to further enhance the transparency of EC meetings by posting agreed minutes of EC meetings on the revamped EC web site. In case discussions in the meeting are of a confidential or sensitive nature, an abridged version of the relevant part of the minutes would be posted instead.
- The revamped web site is expected to be ready in mid 2004 and would be relocated from the HWFB web site to the government web site with a new domain name: www.elderlycommision.gov.hk.

*

*

*