

CHAPTER 2

LIBRARIES IN THE ONLINE WORLD

Introduction

2.1 Access to information online is now a standard expectation of libraries. To remain relevant in the 21st century, and to continue to play their accustomed role in the provision of information resources, libraries of all types have had to accommodate user-access PCs, to support connectivity, to develop digital content and facilitate access thereto, and to develop new skills in their staff and users. In doing so, they have had to maintain their traditional print resources as well, cope with additional connectivity charges and balance expenditure on print versus electronic content.

2.2 Perhaps most importantly, however, in the new digital environment, public libraries in particular have a most significant role to play in ensuring access to online information for those without private access. And by access, we mean more than the provision of an Internet-connected PC, but also assistance to find the required content.

2.3 Equity of access to online information is equally an issue for libraries in the higher education sector, with the rapid move to the provision of learning materials online. It has led to the opening of computer laboratories with 24 hours per day, seven days per week access, and much more pressure on library and academic staff alike to instill in students a critical awareness of the quality of information now readily to hand via an unregulated Internet.

Provision of online services in libraries

2.4 Public libraries have traditionally been early adopters of online information provision. Most had moved to online catalogues, well before public access to them was envisaged; most introduced CD-ROMs soon after they became available. It is unsurprising, therefore, that they should promptly seek access to the Internet for their staff, and the public.

2.5 In 2003, the Council of Australian State Libraries issued statistics on public access Internet terminals in public libraries. In 2000, there were 3,011 public access terminals in public libraries across Australia; 63 per cent of service points had Internet terminals.

2.6 Completely up to date figures were not available, however the Committee did receive indications of the rapid increase in connectivity. The National Library informed the Committee that in mid-2002, 100 per cent of libraries in New South Wales and Victoria were connected to the Internet; connection rates for the other states were 95 per cent in Tasmania, 78 per cent in South Australia, 77 per cent in the

Northern Territory, 74 per cent in Queensland and 45 per cent in Western Australia.¹ By the time of its submission to the Committee, the State Library of Queensland indicated that 80 per cent of Queensland libraries had Internet access.²

2.7 While physical access might not yet be possible Australia-wide, where PCs with Internet connection are available, they are well used. Mr Elwin, CEO of the Wimmera Regional Library Corporation in Victoria, commented that their pods of six computers were always full, from the moment they opened the doors.³

2.8 Ms Rae, CEO of the Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation in Victoria, outlined her experiences with Internet access PCs, in an environment in which there were 31 library access points, 15,000 library PC users, an average population per free PC of 3,500 and 64 per cent home Internet access. She reported a high level of usage of the facilities but that minimal numbers of potential users were turned away because there was not a booking available.⁴

2.9 Some evidence was presented showing that there was an insufficient number of public library terminals to meet demand. Most libraries operated booking systems for online use, and many had time limits. Dr Bundy reported a 2001 survey which indicated that Australian public libraries lacked at least 3,866 public Internet workstations to meet their aspirations for their communities.⁵ It is unclear whether public access demand has almost peaked, and whether any new users who are attracted to the Internet in public places are offset by the numbers acquiring home access.

2.10 While access at some level was generally available via library services (even if this meant once a fortnight via satellite hook-up in a mobile van), the Committee's attention was regularly drawn to inadequacies in the quality of Internet access in some places, particularly where only dial-up access was available. In one case cited, a one-megabyte file took eight hours to download.⁶ The spectre of users sitting reading newspapers at terminals while the information they were seeking appeared on screen is not one calculated to engender enthusiasm on the part of other would-be users, or legislators. While any free public Internet access must be regarded as better than

1 *Submission 19*, p. [3].

2 *Submission 104*, p. [2].

3 *Evidence*, p. 192.

4 *Evidence*, p. 161.

5 *Submission 3*, p. 8.

6 Ms Iuretigh, Warren-Blackwood Economic Alliance, *Evidence*, Australian Telecommunications Network inquiry, p. 605.

none, we need to bear in mind certain minimum access standards, as technology and funding permit. This matter is taken up in Chapter 4.

Libraries versus other online access options

2.11 In Chapter 1, the Committee noted the efforts already made to increase individual and community access to the Internet. The majority of programs appeared to target physical access needs, and did so primarily by means of access centres, including telecentres and regional access centres which provided free or inexpensive Internet connections. In some cases, these centres could be found in the same street or even in the same building as a public library, which may have provided free Internet access. The question for the library community – and for the Committee – was why an established, widespread and heavily used resource as the public library system should not have been at the very heart of this technological largesse. As noted, many libraries did ultimately benefit from NTN initiatives, particularly in South Australia, Queensland and Victoria, but not before a considerable level of duplication had been created, with occasional ill feeling on both sides. The precise extent of duplication of public access online service provision is not clear.

2.12 While most libraries were of the view that they were the most appropriate location for Internet access, this was not a view shared by all. The main argument of librarians in support of their claim was that library staff were always on hand and able to assist users. Other witnesses cast doubt on this. The Committee was told that at a meeting of the Library and Information Service of Western Australia, the lack of suitable training and, in some cases, aptitude, of librarians to provide realistic levels of assistance to people unfamiliar with computing was discussed.⁷

2.13 Restricted opening hours on the part of some libraries was also advanced as a reason for 'rival' public Internet access provision. This argument may have some merit, in some cases. The Committee was told that most metropolitan libraries, and many libraries in large regional centres, now provided extended opening hours covering evenings and weekends, but this is not universally the case.

2.14 It is not clear, however, that all alternative Internet access points have more generous opening hours. Even those which do, often operate with part-time staff, assisted by volunteers, who may have the technical skills to assist users but who may lack training in information seeking.

2.15 Faced with a competitor down the street, and despite their frustration at being overlooked, most librarians acted pragmatically. In the case of Mathoura, where a new

7 Mr Barker, Council on the Ageing, *Evidence*, Australian Telecommunications Network inquiry, p. 59.

CTC/RTC building was opened, the Central Murray Regional Library Service had a library incorporated; the library provided half a wage and for that got full-time library hours and multiuse of the facility's training rooms et cetera.⁸

2.16 It is clear to the Committee that no location should – or could – have monopoly rights to free or inexpensive Internet access provision. Home Internet access is becoming more common, with cable or optical fibre connections for broadband already being built into new housing estates. Public provision will ultimately be via whatever location best suits the local community and that may vary. Co-location of telecentres with Medicare and Centrelink offices, post offices, libraries or TAFE all have some merit. In the course of its telecommunications inquiry, the Committee learnt of some really practical partnerships in remote locations: in remote Georgetown, Queensland, for example, a multi-purpose building housing a geology museum, terrestrial centre, library and Internet cafe was about to open. Internet access was to be free for residents but tourists were to be charged.⁹ While such joint-use facilities might present some interesting administrative challenges, they clearly have much greater prospects of survival than stand-alone operations.

2.17 The Committee nevertheless accepts the argument of librarians that, at present, to get the best out of Internet content, the assistance that can usually be provided via a professional information broker in a library location is highly valuable. It notes, however, a few contrary views. Ms Scott of the Council on the Ageing suggested that, while public libraries were fine for information searching, particularly with sympathetic librarians on hand to provide training and support, many older people would be reluctant to do their Internet transactions in a public library for reasons of security and lack of privacy and indeed, many public libraries had firewalls in place to prevent such transactions. She added:

[Internet access in libraries] is still not the answer for providing access for people who cannot afford access at home. It is one of the answers. Other answers include telecentres, Internet cafes, Post Office kiosks and heaps of other suggestions. They all go some way towards achieving the objective.¹⁰

2.18 In the view of the Committee, none of these other options would necessarily provide improved security or privacy over libraries, nor would supportive human assistance always be available for those who need it. Perhaps part of the answer lies in providing more Internet terminals in a variety of locations, and more privacy around them, wherever they are located.

8 *Evidence*, p. 203.

9 Ms Sutcliffe, Gulf Savannah Development, *Evidence*, Australian Telecommunications Network inquiry, p. 426.

10 *Evidence*, Australian Telecommunications Network inquiry, p. 58.

Changing library use patterns

2.19 In the course of its inquiry, many libraries presented the Committee with results from their own surveys of their users and non-users, following their introduction of online access. One of the more comprehensive of these surveys was that conducted by Mr Gary Hardy of the Centre for Community Networking Research at Monash University. Internet users at 25 Victorian public library services and the State Library during one week in September 2002 were questioned, with some 2442 valid responses being received. Amongst other findings, this survey showed that public libraries were important in bringing new users onto the Internet. Over 48 per cent of respondents indicated that they had been using the Internet in public libraries for less than 12 months; 50 per cent indicated that they believed they would continue their online access via libraries well into the future. The largest percentage of users, at 33.2 per cent, was in the 25-39 age bracket. Fifty-four per cent of respondents received no income, or an income of less than \$26,000 p.a.; 12.8 per cent of respondents were unemployed, 6.3 identified their occupation as 'home duties', 24.9 per cent were students, and 10.5 per cent were retired. A majority used public library access because it was their only option, and because it was either free or cheap. An encouraging number commented that they used library access also because of the 'pleasant atmosphere' and staff assistance. These responses suggested to Mr Hardy, and to the Committee, that the underlying 'safety net' rationale for the provision of public online access in public libraries is working in practice.¹¹

2.20 The State Library of South Australia reported the results of a recent exit interview, which showed an even spread in the age range of users, with at least 10 per cent in each age group; 18 per cent in the 40-49 group; 17 per cent in the 20-29 group; and 16 per cent in the 16-19 group. Fifty per cent of those users classified themselves as students (secondary, tertiary or lifelong learners).¹²

2.21 Libraries also presented much evidence, both from surveys or anecdotal, of changing library patronage following the introduction of public access Internet terminals. Singleton Shire Council told the Committee that in the previous year, 56 per cent of its new library members stated they had joined 'because of the Internet'. An almost universal outcome was the greater use of the PCs by teenage boys and young men, who by and large were not library patrons in the past, unless they were students.¹³

2.22 Another category of new public library Internet user was the older person who was initially encouraged to go online for communication purposes. Again, the same

11 *Submission 94a*, pp. 2-7.

12 *Submission 147*, p. [4].

13 See, for example, Mrs Alexander, Library Manager of the Banana Shire Council, *Evidence*, p. 277; Ms Bauer, Caloundra City Librarian, and Mrs Pestell, Pine Rivers Shire Library Service, *Evidence*, p. 328.

message prevailed: once a person entered the library to learn how to email the grandchildren travelling overseas, the opportunity for him or her to be assisted to explore the Internet as a means of finding out aged pension eligibility details, visa requirements, or explanations of medical terms was opened up.

2.23 Local public library staff reported occasional tensions between new users, in particular teenage boys, and other users. Some indicated that the newcomers could occasionally be harnessed to help less experienced users with their PC problems, while others saw their occasional rowdiness as little different from the user management problems posed by noisy small children. What was generally acknowledged was that, once those persons were in the library, they became aware of the other resources on offer and frequently became regular patrons using a variety of library services.

2.24 The Committee has every confidence in the ability of library staff to manage the new-user phenomenon and to build on it. Much more worrying issues are the non-users, and provisions must be made to ensure that they are not excluded from access to information.

2.25 The new online users of public libraries may have quite differing expectations from the 'traditional' user of what the public library can provide. The City of Swan Library in Western Australia was one to comment on the expectation of its young users that they could locate all their informational requirements through the Internet.¹⁴ Another difference to which library representatives drew the Committee's attention was the expectation that information should always be delivered immediately. Libraries have recognised that they still have much to do in assisting their users to a genuine level of information literacy, an issue which the Committee addresses in Chapter 4.

Effects of remote access to library services

2.26 While many witnesses were able to discount the notion that the Internet would do away with the need for libraries, they did point to major changes in library operations and management that it might bring. Several libraries, or library systems, discussed the impact of their provision of remote access to the library via their websites on library use in person. If in-person patronage declines, this might have implications for space requirements; and with less face-to-face interaction, it may well have implications for the type of person attracted to the profession.

2.27 Evidence on the effects of remote access was mixed, as might be expected in this transitional stage. The State Library of Victoria reported that onsite visits were just beginning to show a downward trend, while remote access was increasing, as more and more users opted for the convenience of 'visiting' the library at a time and place to suit themselves. Remote (or online) visits surpassed onsite visits for the first

14 *Submission 143*, p. [1].

time in January 2002; email reference inquiries are now increasing at a rate of 30 per cent per annum and web site traffic is showing a projected increase of 20 per cent per annum.¹⁵

2.28 A similar pattern was noted at the State Library of South Australia, where physical patronage had declined over the last two years, but online use of the catalogue and databases had increased some 25 per cent in each of the last four years.¹⁶

2.29 The Council of Australian State Libraries (CASL) told the Committee that the number of clients using library services at onsite venues had declined by 4.2 per cent over the last three years, while demand for Internet access to library collections, catalogues, databases and services had increased exponentially. On average, visits to CASL library websites were increasing at 68.41 per cent per year; yet in the year to June 2000 there were still more than 6 million visits to CASL libraries.¹⁷

2.30 At the local library level, however, it appears that in person library visits, lending and use of online services are all increasing. Ms Horn described the situation at Yarra-Melbourne Library, where residents' access to PCs is much higher than the national average, at around 80 per cent, yet the usage of all library services was increasing.¹⁸

Effects on the role of library staff

2.31 With the advent of online public access terminals in libraries, there has been a need for a level of technical expertise not previously required to such a degree. Libraries have been obliged to employ or contract in IT experts, to share technicians with other local government offices, and/or to provide additional IT training for their staff. While new recruits to the profession may take new technology for granted, having been brought up and studied in an electronic world, not all library staff have welcomed the changes.

2.32 The Committee was particularly interested to learn how library staff were adapting to the online revolution, particularly given the ageing demographic of the profession.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, the evidence it received indicated attitudes ranged widely, from Luddites to technophiles. Many staff have taken the changes in their stride, while some have experienced more difficulty in adapting. Mr Hardy of Monash

15 *Submission 126*, p. 3.

16 *Submission 147*, p. [4].

17 *Submission 127*, p. 5.

18 *Evidence*, p. 19.

19 See, for example, *Evidence*, p. 173.

University related the story of a user having to show a reference librarian how to access the Internet; he pointed out that there were still pockets of librarians who have resisted learning online skills because 'that was not what they signed up for and that was not what they wanted'.²⁰

2.33 The Committee was told unequivocally of the heightened expectations of library staff from library users. 'The public are expecting all library staff to be highly skilled in accessing electronic databases, internet searching, repairing and trouble-shooting equipment, as well as having plenty of time to spend assisting library users.'²¹

2.34 Ms Parer of the James Cook University Library described some of the changes in role:

From a professional point of view, we find increasingly that librarians, irrespective of their client group – universities, public libraries or whatever – are really no longer what you would call the old type of librarian. That is why we are called 'infohelp staff'. Half of the time we are computer technicians. I answer questions about every aspect of computer use, such as: 'How do I put double spacing into Word?', 'How do I set up an Excel spreadsheet?', 'How do I download this from the Internet?' or 'How do I scan this and put it in Photoshop and then into a Word document?' Sometimes I wonder whether I am a computer expert or a librarian, particularly when it comes to helping people find information online.²²

2.35 Others such as Mrs Alexander, representing the Banana Shire Library Service, did not believe the roles had changed, just the manner in which libraries delivered the goods: 'Technology sources the info but it does not find it, so our role has not changed – we still help people to find the information.'²³ She added that the techniques now varied with online search capabilities being a lot more sophisticated than going through catalogues or hard-copy indexes – but in the end, in a small regional library, the situation remained as always: 'we are a small area ... we can expect to be all things to everybody'.²⁴

2.36 The Committee sought views from the library representatives who appeared before it on the impact of online services on their workload. When asked whether PCs in the library had increased workload, Ms Holschier of the Central Murray Region Library Service replied, 'Astronomically'.²⁵

20 *Evidence*, p. 61.

21 City of Stirling Public Libraries, *Submission 63*, p. 1.

22 *Evidence*, p. 269.

23 *Evidence*, p. 274.

24 *Evidence*, p. 275.

25 *Evidence*, p. 205.

2.37 This caused the Committee to question the effect of online provision on library staffing levels. The answer was not clear from the evidence presented. ALIA submitted that the library workforce, as derived from the ABS, comprised 9,592 staff in public, or local government, libraries; 2,248 staff in national/state libraries; and 4,298 fte staff in university libraries.²⁶ With the extended opening hours offered to accommodate the increased demand for online access in the evenings and weekends, it appears many libraries are turning to casuals.²⁷

2.38 A perhaps less welcome change in staff duties has emerged. Apart from having to control access to online terminals by operating booking systems in many libraries, staff have had to take on what was described as a 'policing' role – that is, asking users to vacate their terminals when their time is up; checking they are not accessing the wrong things; or changing settings.²⁸

Partnerships

2.39 A major change to libraries in the online era is that an increasing number of them are no longer stand-alone institutions. For small centres, connectivity costs require them to share computing resources with a range of other organisations. This may be the local council, but increasingly it may be an otherwise unrelated organisation. Some branches of the Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation, for example, shares with a NTN-funded community enterprise centre, with the inevitable tensions created by their being free access to the library terminals but charges for the NTN ones.²⁹ Two other branches combine with visitor information centres, with all the difficulties of ensuring that everyone's priorities are met. Undeterred, the Corporation CEO Ms Rae indicated she was hoping to incorporate a rural transaction centre with one of her branches as well.³⁰

2.40 In another example of a practical partnership, the Upper Murray Regional Library enjoyed joint support from both New South Wales and Victoria, despite the legislative hurdles that presented for New South Wales which had to provide its funding via a grant.

2.41 Yet other partnerships were the joint school-community libraries in rural South Australia. The Committee was told that 40 per cent of South Australian public libraries were joint use facilities with schools, with the library generally being consciously positioned on the edge of the campus so that it is obvious it is a

26 *Submission 93*, p. 16.

27 Ms Halliday, *Evidence*, p. 340.

28 Ms Rae, *Evidence*, p. 160.

29 *Evidence*, p. 161.

30 *Evidence*, p. 163.

community facility. The dual function enables them to provide extended opening hours, including in some instances evenings and weekends. Dr Bundy told the Committee that the system of joint use libraries was expanding, with nine per cent of public library outlets being joint use at one level or another.³¹

2.42 While not exactly a partnership, the James Cook University Library's strong relationships with the local community was also noted by the Committee. It offers online catalogue access, a large collection of printed books and journals and ABS data on a walk-in basis and, for an annual subscription of \$110, borrowing rights.³² The library also uses its discretion to provide access to online databases and articles to the professional community.

The physical impact of online services in libraries

2.43 While the Committee saw examples of splendid new library buildings in its inquiry, many older library buildings were never designed with computers in mind. As Ms Sutherland of the Shorelink library group told the committee:

There is a great need in the public library for capital works funding to increase the capacity of buildings in order to operate in this new environment. In the last 20 years we have moved our book stock to make room for two computers here and three computers there. It is a very piecemeal approach. We just do not have the physical capacity.³³

2.44 Mr Murrell of the West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation was another to make the point that the design of public libraries to handle the online environment was going to be a major issue for libraries in the coming years. He explained that the responsibility for keeping the 230-odd Victorian public libraries infrastructure current was with local government. The Victorian Government had come to their assistance with a Living Libraries program for refurbishment and new public libraries infrastructure, providing \$12 million over three years on a matched funding basis, but even that had limitations. In Mr Murrell's estimate, it would cost about \$45,000 for the space to house three Internet PCs with public access.³⁴

2.45 The State Librarian of South Australia, Ms Halliday, told the Committee that her state had committed \$41.2 million to a new building, which would enable her to

31 *Evidence*, p. 353.

32 *Evidence*, p. 260.

33 *Evidence*, p. 136.

34 *Evidence*, p. 18.

provide services in a much more cost efficient manner, compared with those in its 45-year old predecessor.³⁵

2.46 An ageing building infrastructure which restricts the number of computers able to be housed, or located sufficiently far apart to provide a modicum of privacy, is the reality many library services and their users face. It is likely that use of such facilities is more limited than might otherwise be the case. On the other hand, it has been shown that every time a public library is physically upgraded, there is a 20 per cent increase in its usage which never drops off.³⁶

2.47 The Committee is concerned that, despite a few shining examples to the contrary, there has been an overall failure to maintain public library building stock, and that failure is in part a result of the overall decrease in state government funding for public libraries in recent years.

The print versus online dilemma

2.48 Results of user surveys also confirm what one might have suspected, intuitively – some people will always prefer to use print material, others will always prefer online, still others want information first and foremost and are not particular about the format in which it comes. And, despite users' format preferences, much material will only be available in a single format. Which means that for the foreseeable future, libraries will have to continue to handle and provide access to both print and electronic resources. The Committee recognises that the need to handle both print and electronic resources is placing considerable pressure on library resources. The view advanced by Mrs Awcock, Chairman of CASL, was that the digital world would never supplant the world of print but that they would reach a balance.³⁷

2.49 That said, financial imperatives will ensure that choices will increasingly have to be made between formats. An immediate decision facing all libraries, whatever the trend of their funding, is the relative proportion of expenditure on electronic versus print materials. Where users show a preference for print materials, should this be accommodated, even at additional cost? Traditional reference material, such as directories and encyclopaedias, are increasingly being made available electronically, which should ensure their currency – but this is less relevant for a user researching aspects of ancient or medieval history.

2.50 Dr Bundy made the point that, if libraries invest heavily in online resources and technology, they then have limited resources for print materials which may still be much in demand. He noted that over the last few years in Australia, there has been a

35 *Evidence*, p. 339.

36 *Evidence*, p. 338.

37 *Evidence*, p. 48.

relative reduction in libraries' capacity to buy books - a trend he deplored, as it particularly disadvantaged young children who needed to be exposed to reading before they started school.³⁸ He particularly commended the various bookstart schemes run by a few local authorities across Australia, in which a modest investment in giving advice to parents on reading to children and using the public library has born dividends in terms of children's literacy.

2.51 There was an expectation in some quarters that the arrival of e-books would herald the demise of the library as we know it, but to date that fear has not been realised. The technology appears not to have advanced sufficiently to make the reading of a book sufficiently enjoyable for e-books to need to be considered seriously by libraries as yet. People still seem to like the physical medium of the book. As Ms Lim of the Shoalhaven City Library told the Committee:

the technology is not quite there. It is not as comforting on the eyes ... we have an ageing population who are the ones who are probably going to be using it. It is not going to be a comfort for them. You cannot really feel comfortable lying in bed with an e-book.³⁹

2.52 The Committee was told that Shorelink was successful in obtaining a grant from the State Library to trial e-books as a means of improving service to people restricted to their homes and as an alternative to large-print collections.⁴⁰ The cost of downloading was understood to be a problem, however.⁴¹ But as publishing becomes more expensive, and downloading becomes cheaper, the situation may change.

2.53 Libraries have had to face a most serious situation in terms of their provision of periodicals for users. Until quite recently, users would have had access to print copies of a large range of titles. Now, many libraries can no longer afford to subscribe to the printed version, but have been offered cheaper rates for more titles if they subscribe electronically. This has, in effect, forced their hand in favour of the electronic version, but the choice has brought with it a huge range of problems, discussed further in Chapter 4.

Recreational versus informational use of public libraries

2.54 In the course of the Committee's inquiry, there was some debate about the varying uses of public libraries, and whether it was possible or desirable to distinguish between them. A key question is whether it serves any purpose to distinguish between 'information seeking' and "mere" 'recreational' use. The question of whether the rise of the online environment will change the proportion of one or the other is also relevant.

38 *Evidence*, p. 351.

39 *Evidence*, p. 14.

40 *Evidence*, p. 128.

41 *Evidence*, p. 14.

2.55 'Recreational use' can be fairly readily understood to be the borrowing of books, CDs or videos, or web surfing, yet even here, for young children or migrants, there is an element of self-improvement and self-development in the activity. Even the playing of games on the Internet could be categorised as a learning experience, at least initially. Genealogical research, which appears to be increasing in popularity, has a strong 'recreational' element, yet such use of libraries can only be considered positive. Information seeking is somewhat harder to pinpoint but can be remarkably trivial, as in the examples advanced as evidence of the success of the newly introduced online reference service, AskNow!, discussed in Chapter 3. On the other hand, it can be much serious, as in the case of the user attempting to find out the requirements for a 'do it yourself' divorce.

2.56 Representatives of many of the libraries who gave evidence to the Committee provided anecdotal evidence of the library activities of their users in the electronic era, while others described the outcomes of formal user surveys. Mr Hardy of the Centre for Community Networking Research at Monash University provided the results of a week long survey in September 2002 of public access Internet users in 25 public library systems in Victoria, plus the state library. By far the greatest use was email, though as Mr Hardy pointed out, this may have been for many diverse purposes. Other major uses were job research, academic-related research, banking, news and reference, personal interest and hobbies, and travel information and hobbies. An apparent mixture, in short, of recreational and informational use.

2.57 Significantly, in the view of the Committee, only a low level of use was made of government online services.⁴² This may be changing, however. The recent ABS survey of Internet use amongst Australian adults presented a more positive picture, showing that over three million persons accessed government services for private purposes in 2002, up 676,000 on the previous year. It is unclear how many did so via a public library terminal.⁴³

2.58 The review of the NSW Library Act also considered the recreational versus informational use question and concluded, as has the Committee, that there is little merit in attempting to differentiate use.

42 *Submission 94a*, pp. 8-9.

43 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Household Use of Information Technology*, cat. 8146, 2003.

