CHAPTER 3

ONLINE LIBRARY INITIATIVES

National Library initiatives

3.1   The National Library of Australia (NLA) is the one public library directly funded by the Australian Government. In accordance with the *National Library Act 1960,* its role is to collect, preserve and make available Australian and other information resources in a wide range of formats; to support the Australian library system in bibliographic, metadata and directory services; and to contribute to international developments in library and information service in areas such as the development and promulgation of standards.

3.2   In its *Electronic Information Resources: strategies and action plan 2002-2003,* the NLA clearly outlined many of the changes the Committee is grappling with, in this report. Of particular interest to the Committee include the implications of the commercialisation of the Web, the increased use of the Web without intermediation by libraries, the development of portals as interfaces to information, the development of virtual reference services, and the issue of intellectual property rights. Firstly, however, the Committee will consider some of the more traditional functions of the NLA and how they are being handled in an online environment.

Kinetica

3.3   Since 1981, in fulfillment of its national support function, the National Library has provided an online national bibliographic database. In March 1999, it launched Kinetica, an Internet-based service which provides access to the national database, making it possible to search for any item and locate which library in Australia holds it. It also provides cataloguing options for Australian libraries. New records can be added, or records obtained for local catalogues. It also supports a document delivery system. Over one thousand Australian libraries' collections are represented on Kinetica, which contains over 35 million titles.[1]

3.4   Kinetica is available directly to users in some libraries and it is technically possible to use it from home or office, anywhere in Australia. It was created as a cost-recovery service, however. The current funding model is based on payments from libraries, so universal access is effectively unavailable as most libraries are unable or unwilling to devote funds to making access more freely available.

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1   *Submission 104,* p. [1].

3.5   Ms Maslen of the Kinetica Advisory Committee described the way the funding worked:

> The way Kinetica funding works now is based on libraries paying subscriptions or fees that are generally proportional to use, and so the library I work in and all other Kinetica members pay to use the service. Most libraries are unable to afford to fully open up that access to all comers – even to their own users. Indeed, next year, as part of the Kinetica developments, there will be a trial of a public libraries portal that is experimenting with this opening up of access to a range of databases, including Kinetica, through public libraries. But, under the current funding model, that cannot be supported.[2]

3.6   The Committee received mixed evidence on the level of demand for direct public access to Kinetica. A common practice was depicted by Mrs Doe, of the State Library of Tasmania, who indicated that when users required specific titles or articles not available within the State Library, library staff would search Kinetica, locate it and request it on the user's behalf; she did not believe there was public demand for direct access.[3] Mrs Schmidt, representing the Australian Subject Gateways Forum, told the Committee that the Canadians had free use of their national bibliographic database and felt that Australians should do likewise.[4] Dr Bundy also believed it was a great shame that such a 'fantastic national resource' could not be accessed freely by libraries and end users around the country.[5]

3.7   It seems to the Committee that Kinetica still has some way to go in terms of end-user friendliness, a point recognised by the Kinetica Advisory Committee and being addressed. In terms of library access, however, the Committee received unequivocal evidence that libraries which would be considerable beneficiaries from the service felt constrained from using it, on cost grounds. Ms Holschier of the small Central Murray Regional Public Library explained to the Committee that her library service was only a low order user of Kinetica for inter-library loans purposes, adding:

> it is not economically viable for us to pay a huge fee for the number of times we would use it, when we cannot get any [cataloguing] credits. Nevertheless, if we could afford it we would use it. We have a very good local history collection because our area is pretty old, and there are some unique records that are very valuable to local historians and family history reearchers, and it would be valuable if we could get our unique set of

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2   *Evidence,* pp. 85-86.

3   *Evidence,* p. 228.

4   *Evidence,* p. 119.

5   *Evidence,* p. 355.

records onto Kinetica, so that the nation would have access to them ... But we do not have the resources or the budget to do that.[6]

She explained that her library accessed what it needed from Kinetica through other agencies such as ILANet in the State Library of NSW or through a neighbouring larger library, and just paid for what it needed.

3.8   Even libraries which did use Kinetica grumbled about its costing structure. The Committee was told, for example, that Newcastle Region Library paid $15,000 per annum, or 2.4 per cent of its budget, on Kinetica, and regarded it as a valuable service, but felt that it was inappropriate to be charged as much to delete a record, and thus maintain the integrity of the database, as to add one.[7]

3.9   A complaint about Kinetica came from Parramatta City Library, which found that even in the heart of metropolitan Sydney, response times were so poor that the service was compromised. It cited response times of more than 20 minutes, and stated that the simple process of adding a record could become so slow that staff either worked outside normal working hours or simply did not support the national database by adding local publication records.[8]

3.10   While the Committee has not examined in detail the complaints from librarians about specific aspects of the Kinetica service, we would urge the National Library to address the various issues that have been raised. Indeed, we understand that the National Library is in the process of gradually addressing these complaints, but draws these comments to the attention of the Library, including comments that the Kinetica system was so inadequate that many libraries preferred to duplicate effort by cataloguing onto their own systems rather than using Kinetica.[9]

3.11   Mrs Schmidmaier, NSW State Librarian, voiced her strong support for this piece of library infrastructure:

> for the benefit of access to Australian information for Australians, it is really important that participation in [Kinetica] is not made prohibitive by the costs of putting information in and accessing it. That is a very strong recommendation from the way we look at it and from our relationship with public libraries. If they are telling us that they cannot afford to use Kinetica, that goes against the whole philosophy and rationale for the existence of that national bibliographic database.[10]

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6   *Evidence,* p. 218.

7   *Evidence,* pp. 444-45.

8   *Submission 76,* p. 4.

9   See, for example, Mr Goodwin, *Submission 90,* p. [1].

10   *Evidence*, p. 107.

She clarified that her main concern was not so much access to the database as additions to it, so that the basic record of what is published in this country should be as complete as possible.

3.12   Ms Maslen of the Kinetica Advisory Committee voiced the opinion that Kinetica was a key component of Australian public library infrastructure to which all Australians should have access, freely.[11]   Mrs Schmidt, representing the Australian Subject Gateways Forum, also strongly supported the free use of Kinetica, explaining that it would provide enhanced access to all the primary library holdings in Australia, whether print or digital.[12]   And as Ms McPherson of CAUL pointed out,

> The point about Kinetica is that it is one of those things where the whole is much more valuable than the part. The whole as a public good has a value which is greater than probably the value any library would put on it if they were only looking at their own use.[13]

3.13   The Director-General of the National Library explained that any activity not covered by cost recovery was borne by the Library, so to make Kinetica a truly accessible service would require the Library to devote a large percentage of its budget to the service, to the detriment of other activities, or it would require a subvention from government. Mr Toll of the National Library informed the Committee:

> at the moment it would cost the National Library about $4½ million to make the system available free of charge to the existing number of users. If there was a greater number of users, that figure may be greater. With the software licences – both the application software and the system software – generally speaking, those licences do have limits in terms of the number of users, concurrent users or whatever the arrangement is. Therefore, you would expect that most of those would need to be renegotiated. There would also be the issue, at incremental points, of having to upgrade the computing infrastructure in order to carry the additional load that would be encountered.[14]

3.14   The Committee agrees with Dr Bundy and others that Kinetica is a 'fantastic national resource' and that its ongoing development is extremely important. Accordingly the Committee recommends that the National Library receive additional funding to provide improved access to Kinetica for all Australian libraries and end users.

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11   *Evidence,* p. 86.

12   *Evidence,* p. 119.

13   *Evidence,* p. 120.

14   *Evidence,* p. 96.

The National Collection of Australian Online Publications

3.15   Noting that the volume of electronic resources being made available through the Internet is beyond the ability of any one library to collect and preserve, the NLA sees the need to ensure that important documentary heritage resources continue to be available for public use through a system of distributed archives. The NLA is building a national collection of selected Australian electronic resources, a collection formerly known as PANDORA (Preserving and Accessing Networked Documentary Resources of Australia).   A common cataloguing system for these unique Australian materials ensures that they can be easily accessible throughout Australia.

3.16   A number of witnesses spoke of the importance of this digital archive, which contains aspects of Australian culture ranging from The Wiggles to the Real Jeff Kennett website.[15]

3.17   A number of challenges faces the NLA in its role here. Perhaps the most difficult is the current lack of legal deposit obligations for Australian electronic resources, a matter the Committee will address further in Chapter 4. There are many other significant issues to be addressed, including the development of guidelines for national collaborative archiving and preservation of a range of electronic resources; collaboration with publishers to promote best-practice guidelines; the development of streamlined, user-friendly access methods; and the handling of dynamic databases.

Other collaborative efforts amongst libraries

AskNow!

3.18   Library opening hours were frequently mentioned as a limitation on the utility of libraries as public information access points. As the Committee has reported in Chapter 2, libraries have recognised this and those in larger centres are increasingly opening extended hours, to meet the needs of a more varied clientele than before. None as yet, to the best of the Committee's knowledge, opens 24 hours per day, seven days per week. For persons with other means of access to the Internet, however, library web-based services are available around the clock on a self-help basis. In addition, since August 2002, the Council of Australian State Libraries (CASL) has been trialling a collaborative virtual reference service, called AskNow! The CASL Chairman, Mrs Frances Awcock, told the Committee that the service operated between 9am and 7pm across Australia, staffed on a roster basis amongst the participating libraries, and that it was highly successful in attracting the 18-35 year-olds, the very group that libraries find hardest to attract.[16] It offers a live chat service with a reference librarian, who is able to 'push' relevant web pages to the questioner for joint browsing , discussion and, hopefully, resolution of the query.

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15   See for example, *Submission 73,* p. [3].

16   *Evidence,* p. 42.

3.19   The Library Council of New South Wales outlined why this service was so important:

> This new service channel will enable libraries to meet existing clients' needs immediately; build relationships with new users; and increase information literacy as librarians guide the client through search strategies and resources in real time, on line. Libraries will benefit through using staff skills in the online environment; broadening awareness of library collections and services; minimising development costs by sharing expertise and technology; and promoting libraries' collective strengths by applying the best of what libraries and librarians have to offer in terms of evaluating, organising and making accessible information in online and paper based collections.[17]

3.20   The Committee commends this most worthwhile initiative, while noting that participating librarians will need to be alert to the distinction between proffering resources and excessive spoon-feeding or even 'completing' school and higher education projects. And, more importantly, this service presupposes good access to the Internet and hence is of little value to those on the wrong side of the digital divide.

3.21   The Committee was also concerned to learn that licensing rules were impeding the operation of the service. Mrs Doe of the State Library of Tasmania explained that if Tasmanian librarians were dealing with a query from, say, the Northern Territory and could identify an electronic resource that would satisfy the query perfectly, they could not always transmit the relevant pages because under their licensing rules, only the Tasmanian public has the right of access.[18] This matter is considered further in Chapter 4.

Promotional activities

3.22   During this inquiry, the Committee was impressed by the number of initiatives in place to assist the public to engage meaningfully in the online world. It was concerned, however, that so many of these innovative and helpful approaches appeared not to be widely known. How to find an Internet access terminal was a case in point. NOIE has made available a NetSpots directory, both electronically and via a telephone hotline, which provides details of the nearest terminals, including those located in libraries, to the would-be user, their opening hours, and charges if applicable.

3.23   Many library witnesses told the Committee that their user and non-user surveys regularly showed that many people were surprised to learn that libraries did more than lend books.   The need to promote the growing range of library services

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17   *Submission 130,* p. 21.

18   *Evidence,* p. 229.

seems pressing and is beginning to be recognised and acted upon. CASL is sponsoring a major national campaign called @your library, based on a model used in the USA, to coordinate the promotion of libraries.[19] In South Australia, the State Library has initiated a 2003@your library promotional program, involving all libraries in the state. Wattle Park library told the Committee that it was promoting its services via this approach.

3.24   To the best of its knowledge, there has been no promotional activity by either the Australian Government or any state government, to advocate the use of public libraries as sources of government information. This is disappointing, at a time when more and more government information is being made available electronically and a majority of the population still does not have online access at home. A recent ABS survey showed that some 21 per cent of Australian adults accessed government services for private purposes via the Internet in 2002 but only six per cent did so via a public library computer.[20] The Committee recommends that whenever the Australian Government advertises its electronic services, it adds a statement to the effect that further information can be obtained from the local public library. It encourages state governments to do likewise.

PictureAustralia

3.25   Libraries, art galleries and museums across Australia have considerable collections of visual material, material which until recently could not easily be shared with others outside of the host institution. A collaborative effort between the National Library, the state libraries, the National Archives, the Australian War Memorial and a growing number of other institutions has ensured that this is changing. PictureAustralia was formally launched in September 2000, after a two year pilot project. Each collaborating institution pays a small fee to belong.

3.26   Mr Bertie of the State Library of Victoria explained how PictureAustralia operated. It is an Internet-based service that allows users to search many significant online pictorial collections at the same time. Images are captured digitally according to agreed standards but remain on the server of the host institution; they are described using agreed metadata standards, with the metadata stored in a single repository.[21] Images found through PictureAustralia may be reproduced for research or study purposes, with proper attribution, though for commercial use or publication, copyright permission must be sought.

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19   *Submission 127,* p. 9.

20   Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Household Use of Information Technology,* Cat. 8146, 2003.

21   *Evidence,* p. 34.

Subject gateways

3.27   Themes reiterated by many witnesses to the Committee's inquiry were the exponential growth of the Internet, the amount of unreliable material it contained, and the difficulty at times of pinpointing wanted information. As Ms Thorsen of the Australian Subject Gateways Forum told the Committee, search engines such as Google claim to index some three billion pages and are reasonably sophisticated in their search mechanisms, however the average information seeker is generally not. Keyword searching often results in huge numbers of 'hits', many of which are of questionable quality.[22]

3.28   One approach libraries are taking to assist Internet users is the development of subject gateways, which 'evaluate, identify, collect, describe and then make available resources that are considered to be of high quality and key resources in particular subject areas'.[23]   Many have been developed with the assistance of Australian Research Council grants, and most are hosted by academic libraries which pay upkeep costs. Gateways that are part of the voluntary Australian Subject Gateways Forum are generally free, concentrate on Australian content, and do not duplicate existing resources. In the case of WebLaw, a legal gateway, some 22 institutions are involved, each specialising in a particular aspect of the law, and building links to documents or sites not open to normal web browsing.

3.29   One problem that the representatives of the Australian Subject Gateways Forum identified was the inability at present to search across multiple gateways, as is possible in the UK with the Resource Discovery Network. With more and more research of an interdisciplinary nature, cross-gateway searching would be of considerable benefit.

3.30   Subject gateways are but one facet of the research information infrastructure, for which a holistic approach is under consideration. A framework proposed by the Higher Education Information Infrastructure Implementation Steering Committee is to be implemented by a high-level Australian Research Information Infrastructure Committee chaired by Professor Hume, Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, with the aim of better managing Australia's research information and improving access to it by using emerging technologies. [24]

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22   *Evidence,* p. 118.

23   *Evidence,* p. 118.

24   Dr Brendan Nelson, *Boosting Australia's research infrastructure,* Media Release 14 Aug 2003.

Digitisation developments

3.31   Many libraries, by chance or design, are the repositories of extensive hard-copy and often fragile local history collections, including maps and manuscripts. The National Library commenced digitising some of its collections in 1995. The State Library of NSW is marking the centenary of the opening of the Mitchell Library in 2010 with a program of digitisation initiatives, including the digitisation of its Matthew Flinders collection in 2001. Flinders' diaries, logbooks, charts, personal artefacts and portraits are now available via the web, making this unique material accessible worldwide to support education, scholarship and community interest. The Committee notes with interest that this project was made possible by private sector sponsorship; it further notes that in its first year, it proved remarkably popular, with over 50,000 page views.[25]

3.32   Similar digitisation activity was reported by many other libraries and library systems. James Cook University Library, for example, has digitised its collection of historic photos of the environmental campaigns in the Daintree and made then available to a wider audience throuh its own web pages and through PictureAustralia. It is also working on the digitisation of some 32,000 photographs of Townsville, and with the assistance of two persons employed under the Community Jobs Plan, is scanning the Nelly Bay archives. In each case, the library has complied with the standards and assigned metadata as required by the National Library.[26]

3.33   While digitisation is seen as immensely important by libraries, and is valued by users, it is beyond the resources of many libraries to undertake, unaided, and few have the profile of the Mitchell Library to attract corporate sponsors. Even the NSW State Librarian commented:

> there is no funding for this area of activity. Our focus, on the national scale, and with our state and national colleagues, is on the material that is unique to us which will add to the knowledge of Australian history and social life. We contribute to that through a range of initiatives. However, they are the sorts of things that are very difficult to fund within our current normal budgetary environment.[27]

3.34   The importance of preserving local history items and making them more widely available digitally has been recognised, with the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, in partnership with the National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia, offering Community Heritage Grants to assist in the digitisation of such resources. The Committee recommends:

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25   *Submission 130,* p. 8.

26   *Evidence,* p. 263.

27   *Evidence,* p. 107.

> (a) the continuation of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Community Heritage Grants digitisation program; and,
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> (b) the addition of a new National Heritage Grants program for peak cultural institutions to assist in the digitisation of their collections.

3.35   The fact remains, however, that nobody can afford to digitise all the records of the past. CASL representatives pointed out that libraries needed to set priorities in choosing material to digitise, just as they do in collection building, and that items of national and state significance should take priority.[28]

3.36   Digitisation is important for much more than local history collections, of course. One glaring gap in the Australian context pointed out to the Committee by many witnesses was the unavailability online of postgraduate theses presented to Australian universities.[29] Each university is responsible for its own postgraduate theses. The Committee was told that CAUL had set up an Australian digital theses project in 1997, but that there was not a lot of data in it.[30] Many university libraries were, however, creating e-print repositories of research articles produced by their own researchers.[31]

3.37   The Committee notes the recent formation of an Australian Research Information Infrastructure Committee (ARIIC),[32] intended to act on recommendations for managing and using the vast amounts of research information generated by Australia's universities and research organisations. The Committee recommends that the ARIIC consider the question of the availability online of Australian postgraduate theses as a matter of priority.

3.38   There is a growing demand for digitised content at the desktop, including pre-digital newspapers and journal articles. The Committee's attention was drawn to a commercially available service provided by RMIT Publishing and the Copyright Agency Ltd, in cooperation with the National Library, which provides digital images of a wide range of Australian journal article indexed in the Australian Public Affairs Information Service and the Australian Medical Index.

3.39   This throws into sharp focus the question of what information should be freely available, and what is deemed to be 'value-added' and can legitimately be charged for. A further question, in the form of the mechanics of charging so as to reduce the administrative burden, must then be addressed.

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28   *Evidence,* p. 48.

29   See, for example, *Evidence*, p. 297; p. 416.

30   *Evidence,* p. 416.

31   *Evidence*, p. 297.

32   Dr Brendan Nelson, *Boosting Australia's Research Infrastructure,* Media release 433/03.

Other cooperative arrangements

3.40   As many witnesses remarked, libraries have a strong tradition of cooperation, born perhaps out of necessity, but noteworthy, nonetheless. Cooperation has taken many forms, including for example the cataloguing, inter-library loans and digitisation initiatives facilitated by the National Library and described above. But a wide variety of cooperative and formal consortia arrangements have been initiated by libraries to help them make their funding stretch further and to serve their users better. The Committee draws attention to just a few of them.

3.41   One example is the Shorelink cooperative library network on Sydney's lower north shore, which was formed 20 years ago to service five councils. With only some 221,000 residents across the five councils, it would have been expensive individually to set up infrastructure from scratch but by spreading the fixed costs across a broader resident base it has enabled member councils to provide a better standard of service. Jointly, they are able to open 69 hours per week.

3.42   Also in New South Wales, the Metropolitan Public Libraries Association and the Country Public Libraries Association banded together to organise the first consortia purchasing deal for Kinetica, which provides financial benefits as well as advantaging both their members and end users.[33]

State library networking initiatives

3.43   As the Committee noted in Chapter 1, in both New South Wales and Victoria, each library service is responsible for the total provision of library services. With the advent of the Internet, it was obvious that the regional and rural libraries would be disadvantaged, if they had to bear the full cost of connectivity. So each state came up with a means of dealing with the issue.

3.44   NSW.net is an initiative of the State Library of New South Wales. It has managed an ISDN network for councils and public libraries across NSW, and provided subsidised access to the Internet, since 1997, and is continuing to monitor and trial other access options such as ADSL. Free public access Internet terminals, including one per branch with adaptive software, have been installed in 'virtually' every public library in the state. In addition, NSW.net provides free access to two online bibliographic databases for all NSW public libraries and helps coordinate consortia purchases of additional databases. It also supports the Rural Link project, to establish online access via satellite in remote communities.[34]

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33   *Evidence,* p. 129.

34   *Submission 130,* p. 15.

3.45   Most recipient libraries spoke warmly of the initiative, though some smaller rural communities had experienced telecommunications problems because the local telephone exchanges could not cope.[35] Ms Wallace of the Metropolitan Public Libraries Association suggested that, while there might not be huge financial incentives from belonging to NSW.net, the attraction of the content that was available through the consortium was significant, as was the opportunity to be part of technology trials and to be at the forefront of what was being offered.[36]

3.46   The funding for NSW.net came from the state government. The rationale for rolling out a connection to councils as opposed only to libraries was that councils would then be more willing to pick up the ongoing costs once the initial infrastructure had been rolled out. There was some suggestion that the sustainability of the network in the longer term was in question.[37]

3.47   VICNET is a division of the State Library of Victoria, one of whose activities is to supply infrastructure and bandwidth to most of the public libraries in Victoria. It is basically a cost-recovery service. Mr Bertie, representing the State Library, explained that communications suppliers had been prepared to offer a good deal because of the aggregated market, but that they had had very limited success with the major telecommunications companies.[38] The relationship is purely commercial, and there is no special e-rate offered.

3.48   While a former general manager of the project, Mr Gary Hardy, explained, that in their haste to implement online services in libraries, they may have proceeded suboptimally,[39] at least a basic level of online access has been provided via this service.

Development of users' online skills

3.49   In this relatively early stage of the information revolution, the first requirements for would-be Internet users are basic IT skills. These are a 'given' for most students, but not for older persons who may have retired from the workforce before the advent of computers. NATSEM modelling in 2000 found that retirees were the most disadvantaged population group in terms of home Internet access, with some 63 per cent of them projected to be without Internet access at home this year.[40] Even if this proves to be pessimistic, there is clearly a huge group of potentially

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35   See for example, *Evidence,* p. 105, pp. 132-33.

36   *Evidence,* p. 133.

37   *Evidence,* p. 104.

38   *Evidence,* p. 35.

39   *Evidence,* p. 56.

40   R. Lloyd & O Hellwig, *Barriers to the take-up of new technology,* Discussion Paper 53; NATSEM 2000, p. 28.

disadvantaged citizens unable to participate in the online world without considerable assistance. And that assistance means not only providing access to an online computer, but also training in its use.

3.50   Libraries can provide an excellent environment for older persons to be exposed to computers and the Internet, given their reputation as safe, centrally located, welcoming places where one-on-one support, or the reassurance and encouragement of group classes, can take place. And libraries are already well patronised by older Australians. Many library witnesses outlined the programs they were running for seniors, and the obvious popularity they enjoyed.

3.51   The Internet can seem inordinately complex for novice online information seekers. At a simplistic level, 'surfing' the Net can be appealing to many, but actually using it to find necessary information can be a challenge. This was recognised early as governments contemplated the capabilities of the Internet as a vehicle for the provision of government information. A *Strategic Framework for the Information Economy* outlined the issues:

> One of the more daunting aspects of the Internet is the sheer volume of material it carries. Along with the problems in locating information that is useful or relevant, there may be difficulties in verifying the authenticity or currency of the information. This is of particular concern in relation to information on medical treatments, for example. It may be that people start to make more use of professional information brokerage services, or 'single entry point' gateways and web-rings. Public libraries have traditionally performed this type of intermediary role – consideration needs to be given to a greater expansion of this role in the online environment.[41]

3.52   The other group of users for whom training in advanced searching skills, rather than keyboarding skills per se, is highly desirable is the student population. Many of the academic librarians who gave evidence to the Committee recounted disheartening tales of the propensity of students to search superficially and to take whatever information came to hand easily. In the Committee's inquiry, librarians frequently commented on their users' apparent preference for simplistic information-seeking approaches. As Ms McPherson, President of the Council of Australian University Libraries, commented:

> librarians have a grave concern about the quality of information that people use and what we can deliver to them. Despite the training we do in skills and information literacy with students, a number of recent research studies show that students nevertheless prefer Google [a search engine] because it is easy

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41   *A Strategic Framework for the Information Economy: identifying priorities for action*, Canberra, 1998, p. 9.

and uses only a few keystrokes. The fact that ... only nine per cent of journals are available in the public Internet fazes them less than the fact that they seem to get a lot of returns for a few keystrokes. That is a constant battle. The more that we can do through things like subject gateways and the development of customised interfaces, which deliver an information environment particular to their discipline or their department or to their needs at the moment, the more we are able to close that gap. It is not just a matter of increasing their skills; it is also a matter of decreasing the skills that they need to access the information.[42]

3.53   The Committee was heartened to learn of the numerous efforts of librarians to work with academic staff in developing genuine i-literacy programs for students. As Mrs McCarthy of the Queensland University of Technology told the Committee:

We do skills training where we work in partnership with colleagues within the rest of our division, with people in the IT area and with instructional designers. We also work in an orientation situation where we have an integrated orientation program that covers information literacy skills, IT literacy skills and academic literacy skills, and our librarians teach across all three of those areas on a regular basis ... It is a very changed role for the librarian these days.[43]

3.54   As Ms McPherson of CAUL pointed out, increasing Internet users' skills is only half the battle; much can also be done via subject gateways, web portals, and well-constructed metadata to decrease the skills required to search for information electronically.[44] In Chapter 4, the Committee considers the support for such initiatives recently announced by the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training.

Projects for special groups

Indigenous Australians

3.55   If online access can be difficult for the general community, the situation for indigenous Australians is considerably worse. The Committee was encouraged to learn, therefore, of the development of indigenous knowledge centres in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Three were being developed in the Northern Territory; while five were in operation in Queensland by April 2003, with six more scheduled to open within 12 months, and a total of 31 to be established by 2005.[45] As the Queensland State Librarian explained, the intention was to work with the communities concerned to develop services to meet their needs, which might not

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42   *Evidence,* pp. 122-3.

43   *Evidence,* p. 307.

44   *Evidence,* p. 123.

45   *Submission 103,* p. 7.

be for a traditional library service per se but ongoing training, homework centres for children and cultural revitalisation.[46]

3.56   In the Northern Territory, the three proposed knowledge centres are designed to provide quite different types of services: one at Wadeye is being located with a rural transaction centre, and is oriented towards the provision of information on what is happening in the rest of the Territory; another at Galiwinku is more culturally based and hopes to engage in e-commerce; while a third, at Anmatjere, has a strong leaning towards the provision of tourist information.[47]   These three, and future, knowledge centres will also incorporate 'traditional' library services but, as Mr Beale of the Northern Territory Library and Information Service pointed out, with low literacy levels in Aboriginal communities, such traditional services are largely inappropriate.[48]

3.57   Even more encouraging was the effort being made to integrate the delivery of federal- and state-funded services to indigenous communities in Queensland. Ms Giles-Peters told the Committee that the State Library had employed an Aboriginal library manager who could work with the Aboriginal Coordinating Council, the Island Coordinating Council, ATSIC, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, the Department of Education, et cetera, to achieve that end.[49]

3.58   In the university sector, the initial challenge for prospective indigenous students is to access online handbooks and complete enrolment procedures online, as is now the norm. Mr Oates of the Indigenous Learning Centre of Central Queensland University explained that his centre took on that task for prospective students. He pointed out that across the country, there were about 36 Aboriginal resource centres in universities with 24-hour access computer labs but that they were of little support to the many external students. In his view, NTN money would have been better spent giving IT support in the home by way of equipment loans via the relevant university library to every one of the 4,500 Aboriginal students who were successful in continuing at university.[50]

3.59   Mr Oates was highly critical of the assumption that the way to access Aboriginal communities was through the community organisations. He told the Committee that 'If you put the NTN connection in one of the organisations, the others get their noses out of joint and will not use it.'[51] On the other hand, however, he applauded the Indigenous Collections Management Project, a collaborative project between the Distributed Systems Technology CRC, the Smithsonian Institute's

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46   *Evidence,* p. 317.

47   *Evidence,* p. 142.

48   *Evidence,* p. 142.

49   *Evidence,* p. 318.

50   *Evidence,* p. 287.

51   *Evidence,* p. 287.

National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resources Centre and his own organisation. The intention of the project is to create a 'virtual' keeping place by collaborating with indigenous communities or custodial organisations in preserving resources, developing content description, culturally sensitive access provisions and appropriate metadata models.[52]

Persons with physical disabilities

3.60   With current building requirements, access to public libraries for people with physical disabilities tends not to be a problem. Older-style libraries may present problems but resourceful library managers have sometimes been able to overcome the problem by working with community mobility services.[53]

3.61   The Committee was told of a huge range of resources which have been developed to help people with disabilities in their online access. They include screen magnifiers, screen readers, voice recognition software, alternative keyboards, alternative pointing devices, trackballs, touch screens and many others.[54]

3.62   In each of 1998-99 and 1999-2000 the Australian Government provided $1.5 million to the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts for an AccessAbility program to support innovative projects that help people with disabilities gain improved access to online information and communications services. The program was wound up in May 2002.

3.63   One of the projects to receive funding under the AccessAbility program was a study of online services for people with disabilities in Australian public libraries, by researchers from Monash and Charles Sturt Universities and VICNET.[55]   The study found that a great deal of excellent adaptive equipment and software existed for use by persons with a range of different disabilities, but it needed to be selected with great care for a public library setting and it needed to be practical and easy for librarians to support. No one piece of equipment could cater for all needs so compromises were necessary. The study recommended that libraries seek partnerships with local disability organisations to assist in training. Library accessibility issues remained. And, sensibly, the study concluded that the initiative of placing at least one PC with adaptive technology in each public library should be the subject of simple but regular evaluation of its use. The study also identified the absence of suitable web sites for people with low literacy skills.

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52   *Submission 153,* pp. 14-15.

53   See, for example, *Evidence,* p. 11.

54   See, for example, Willoughby City Council, *Submission 40,* p. 3.

55   K. Williamson et al., *Online fairways for people with disabilities: achieving par in public libraries,* http://www.dcita.gov.au/Article/0,,0_1-2_3-4_111395,00.html

3.64   The Committee perceives an ongoing need for the identification and testing of adaptive technologies for the use of online equipment by persons with disabilities and of the use of such equipment in public libraries. If no alternative funding mechanisms for such research are in place, the Committee recommends the funding of another round of AccessAbility grants.

Seniors

3.65   NOIE insists that older Australians are steadily increasing their Internet use[56] yet this is from a very low base. Even the most recent statistics indicate that they are considerably less likely to use the Internet than their younger brethren. While Internet usage by seniors may be increasing, that usage is primarily for email purposes.[57] In itself, this is not a problem. Seniors may move on to other online activities once the initial fear and perhaps distrust of the new medium evaporates and they become familiar with the technology. Most public libraries have seen the need to encourage seniors' online usage and have offered individual or group training.   The Library Department of the City of Armadale in Western Australia was one of many library systems to run free 'Surfing Seniors' courses, which proved highly popular and were booked out weeks in advance.[58]

3.66   Another initiative which the Committee observed in action was the COIN program in Rockhampton, a joint effort of the Rockhampton City Council and the University of Central Queensland, funded through a Families and Communities grant under the Families and Community Networking Initiative. COIN was established to provide training in interactive communication technologies, initially to 'at risk' groups within the community and in particular, to senior citizens, in advance of the provision of facilities in the proposed new library.

3.67   In 2000, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission reported on the accessibility of electronic services for older and disabled Australians. It found that a substantial number of older people simply did not see sufficient benefit in new technologies to invest effort in using them. This attitude is perfectly reasonable on the part of the people concerned, but is of some concern, pragmatically speaking, for governments seeking to achieve cost savings or more effective service through new technologies. Of more concern, however, is whether people are being excluded from

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56   NOIE, *Older Australians Online,*

 http://www.noie.gov.au/projects/access/Connecting_Communities/older_aust.htm

57   ibid.

58   *Submission 77,* p. 3.

online services and information because of avoidable barriers to access, such as cost, lack of training or limited or inadequate public access facilities.[59]

3.68   The Seniors Online Strategy, a partnership between the NSW Government and Microsoft Australia, was launched in March 2001. Microsoft is committing $500,000 in software and licences over a three-year period to complement $1.7 million from the NSW Government. Seniors Online is both promotional, outlining the benefits of computer and Internet use for seniors in their daily lives, and practical, providing specific training courses for older people to help them come to grips with new technology. A specific web site http://www.seniorscard.nsw.gov.au has been set up to enable seniors to update their Seniors Card membership details and to access whole-of-government information and services.[60]

Persons from a non-English speaking background

3.69   Public library access to multilingual information is highly variable throughout the country. In localities with large, well-established foreign-born communities, provision may be quite good in a range of formats, including the Internet, but for small communities with few speakers of a particular language, the position is fairly dire. Each state has taken steps, individually, to improve information provision for its non-English speaking residents. Where the level of literacy in the first language is an impediment, access to information resources is usually mediated via a health care worker, social worker, librarian or settlement officer.

3.70   The Victorian Open Road project [http://www.openroad.viv.gov.au] is a prototype project which has attracted attention. Computers purchased as part of a statewide rollout of public access workstations by VICNET were pre-configured for multilingual web browsing; a training program was developed to provide library staff with skills to assist their users locate and access web pages in languages other than English; a web directory was developed to provide access to quality online resources in 12 community languages; and a website providing access to information about multicultural library services was also developed.[61]

3.71   Queensland has recently launched a multicultural bridge site, which has information about libraries and accessing information in 14 community languages, as well as links to foreign language newspapers and radio broadcasts. It brings everything together in the one place to make it easier for librarians and home-based users alike.[62]

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59   Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Accessibility of electronic commerce and new service and information technologies for older Australians and people with a disability,* HREOC, Sydney, 2000.

60   See http://www.microsoft.com/australia/empower/projects/seniorsonline.asp.

61   *Submission 112,* pp. [4-5].

62   *Evidence,* p. 317.

3.72   In New South Wales, NSW.net–distributed computers were all pre-configured for multilingual web surfing in common community languages.

3.73   The Victorian Government has funded Skills.net to provide grants to community organisations to provide training in the use of the internet and access to the Internet. Specific target communities are those who might not otherwise use the Internet. Training to date has been provided for 80,000 Victorians at 380 across the state; approximately 10 per cent of Skills.net providers are delivering training and access to people from non-English speaking backgrounds.[63]

3.74   The Committee was also told of a South Australian State Library initiative called the English Language Learning and Information Service. People whose first language is, say, Mandarin, can learn English from volunteers in the library and in exchange, teach on a voluntary basis people who want to learn Mandarin.[64]

3.75   At the individual library level, the Committee was told of the role of the Singleton Library in providing Internet access and developing a special web site to help integrate the Kosovars into the local community during the Singleton Safe Haven Project.

3.76   A joint submission from multilingual consultants in the state libraries of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland gave the Committee considerable insights into the problems involved in providing Internet access to linguistically diverse users. Public libraries provide access only to the languages that come pre-configured with the PC operating systems and web browsers installed, which immediately limits the range of languages available; many existing library catalogues also do not support multilingual records.[65]

Public/private sector initiatives

3.77   In the course of its inquiry the Committee could not fail to note the commendable tendency of library managers everywhere to cooperate in an attempt to stretch their operating dollar further. As we noted previously, Australian corporations have a poor track record of philanthropy generally, and that extends to the library sector. So it is with considerable pleasure that we make mention of just a few extremely worthwhile private sector collaborations with libraries. In doing so, the Committee would also like to encourage more corporations, especially those with a vested interest in online technology or communications, to consider similar benevolence.

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63   *Submission 126,* p. 5.

64   *Evidence,* p. 47.

65   *Submission 112,* p. [4].

3.78   The Council of Australian State Libraries told the Committee its members had been involved in more than 134 sponsorships, partnerships and joint projects with the corporate sector, valued at more than $6.6 million, since 2000.[66] These projects covered many areas of library activity, from the promotion of literacy through, amongst others, the Nestle Write Around Australia project, conservation, digitisation and training.

3.79   The BHP Billiton Skillsnet projects are a shining, and award-winning, example of what can be achieved. The Queensland project, involving the State Library of Queensland, BHP Billiton, Ipex and Telstra, provides free computer and Internet training to rural and regional centres across the state.[67] BHP Billiton contributes significant funding, while the State Library staff provide the tuition. The New South Wales project complements the rollout of Rural Link broadband connectivity to rural and remote communities across the state. The project provides training products, services and support to participating public libraries to improve their capacity to deliver Internet training to their local communities, and has a strong information literacy component. Most encouragingly, the Committee learnt that every effort is to be made to integrate training with other local Internet providers and educational agencies.[68]

3.80   Sponsorship from Mr James Fairfax AO enabled the New South Wales State Library to create and make available worldwide in 2001 an electronic archive of the papers of Matthew Flinders held in the Mitchell Library. His private diaries, logbooks, charts, personal artefacts and portraits are now available on the web, thus helping to ensure the preservation of the originals as well as extending access to these heritage materials.[69]

3.81   Another government-private sector initiative is the Seniors Online Strategy, mentioned above, a partnership between the New South Wales Government and Microsoft.[70]

3.82   In yet another worthwhile initiative a major US database provider, Dialog, has provided access to its databases worth US$1 million to Australia's 14 library schools to enable librarians in training to gain some of the skills they will require in the workforce.[71]

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66   *Submission 127,* p. 9.

67   *Submission 103,* p. 7; *Submission 155,* p. [3].

68   *Submission 130,* pp. 17-18.

69   *Submission 130,* p. 10.

70   See http://www.microsoft.com/australia/empower/projects/seniorsonline.asp

71   *Evidence,* p. 417.

Overseas initiatives

3.83   The Committee did not make an extensive study of library provisions in other parts of the world. It reports here some of the overseas library initiatives that were described to it and which may have some merit in the Australian context.

United Kingdom

3.84   Libraries in the United Kingdom (UK) have received an enormous boost in recent times thanks to a major government initiative to bring Internet access and online services to the whole UK population. Entitled the People's Network, and lottery funded, it was designed by the Library and Information Commission, now Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. Some £120 million over three years has been invested in installing PCs and broadband network connections in public libraries and in training library staff how to use it. Services are free, or at minimal cost, including email.

3.85   An early review of the People's Network by Professor Peter Brophy of Manchester University was extremely positive, finding that it was being used, and used by disadvantaged groups in the community without other ready means of Internet access. While acknowledging that it was too early to extrapolate nationally, Professor Brophy believed there was encouraging evidence that the People's Network was meeting the needs of the less advantaged sectors of society. He also found that there was a positive knock-on effect on reading and other general library use, with an estimated 40 per cent of non-members of libraries joining the library after using the People's Network facilities there.

3.86   In his review, Professor Brophy also addressed the question of why libraries were chosen to house the network. He found that, apart from the sheer 'reach' of the public library system, with its 4,488 branches across the UK, the atmosphere in libraries was less off-putting than other alternatives:

> it is all too easy to underestimate the importance of a sympathetic environment in which to try out PCs for the first time, or to practice IT skills. For many people the fear of 'making a fool of myself' or breaking the machine by doing the wrong thing is a major turn-off. Creating supportive and encouraging settings is a substantial issue.[72]

3.87   A related lottery-funded project is to accelerate the rate of digitisation of important materials, and Resource is working with a number of other partners on reader development projects and online cultural programs.

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72   Peter Brophy, *The People's Network: a turning point for public libraries*, Resource, 2002, p. 14.

3.88   Another development in the UK was the 19 March 2002 announcement of a strategic alliance between the British Library and the Higher Education Funding Council for England, to ensure adequate recognition of the fact that academic research accounts for some 50 per cent of the British Library usage, and that that research was dependent on the resources provided by the Library. Key areas for future collaboration include developing e-learning resources, contributing to the e-university and working with the public library network.[73]

Canada

3.89   Mrs Schmidt, representing the Australian Subject Gateways Forum, told the Committee that Canada has a national bibliographic database, similar to the National Library's Kinetica, which is provided free of charge to all Canadians to use.[74] And in another worthwhile initiative, Canada has developed a National Site Licencing Project which has made desktop access to electronic versions of research databases in science, engineering, health and environmental disciplines available for 64 participating universities across the country.[75]

Singapore

3.90   With a population of just over four million, Singapore has provided $1 billion since 1996 to develop its library infrastructure, content and literacy programs.[76] Even more has been spent to integrate public libraries and education at a very high level with high level government support[77] with the result that information literacy rates are already 55 per cent and rising.

3.91   The Committee was told that it was the national goal of Singapore to build an e-inclusive society, where everybody is able to reap the benefits of ICT, with technology accessible and affordable to all, regardless of age, language, social background or ability. Training centres have been established in libraries to equip people with basic computer and Internet skills. All members of the national library system have access to an eLibraryHub, a community and content portal holding some 10,000 electronic books, 13,000 electronic magazines, journals and databases, 900 video-on-demand titles and 700 CD-Rom that are streamed through the Singapore ONE network.[78]

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73   *Submission 127,* p. 11.

74   *Evidence,* p. 119.

75   See http://www.cnslp.ca.

76   *Submission 126,* p. 7.

77   *Evidence,* p. 92.

78   *Submission 77,* p. 3.

New Zealand

3.92   New Zealand has recently enacted a National Library Act 2003, S22 of which establishes a Library and Information Advisory Commission, consisting of up to six members and with the National Librarian as ex officio member. The Commission's purpose is to provide advice to the Minister on library and information matters, including access to services and the role of library and information services in the cultural and economic life of New Zealand. The minister called for nominations for the Commission in June of this year.[79]

United States of America

3.93   The Committee was told that most schools and libraries in the USA are provided with a special discount rate to obtain affordable telecommunications and Internet access.[80] The Schools and Libraries Support Mechanism, popularly known as the e-rate, makes technology such as the Internet affordable for every public school and public library in the USA by providing discounts on eligible services. Libraries and schools in low-income urban communities and rural areas qualify for highest discounts to assure that every American, regardless of age, income or location, has access to the essential tools of the information age. Established by the Telecommunications Act 1996 and funded at up to US$2.25 billion per annum by contributions from the telecommunications companies, the e-rate provides discounts of between 20 and 90 per cent on the costs of telecommunications, Internet access and network wiring. The e-rate is administered by the Schools and Libraries Division of the Universal Service Administrative Company, a not-for-profit corporation overseen by the Federal Communications Commission.[81]

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79   See http://www.natlib.govt.nz/en/whatsnew/minister_nominations.html

80   *Submission 135,* p. 6.

81   http://www.sl.universalservice.org