CHAPTER 4

SOME CHALLENGES OF THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

A national information policy?

4.1 A considerable number of witnesses to this inquiry pointed to the need for a federally-enunciated statement encompassing, variously, such themes as e-government, content creation and delivery, the quality of information, universal access to information (social inclusion), metadata and interoperability, and information literacy. While there was a distinct lack of uniformity about what exactly was required, it was obvious to the Committee that there was a desire for some overarching national approach that went beyond the connectivity issue and that recognised a legitimate role for libraries in the information age.

4.2 The Library Board of Victoria submitted that the Australian Government should be leading the further development of the Australian library network in the online environment. It called for the Australian Government to facilitate the development and implementation of a national information policy, incorporating national strategies for connectivity, content and competencies, yet developed with the capacities of smaller public information bodies in mind. It pointed to the example of Singapore, with a population of some 4.1 million, but which has developed a national information strategy and has provided, since 1996, $1 billion to develop its library infrastructure, content and literacy programs.[1]

4.3 The lack of recognition of the key role public libraries play as information access points was a matter frequently raised with the Committee. Many libraries which advocated the development of a national information strategy did so in the hope of redressing that situation.[2] Mr Bentley of the Wolanski Foundation stressed that any such national information management plan not be based on the interests of the dominant sector, the ICT industry.[3]

4.4 Dr Alan Bundy was another to note that the lack of a national information strategy was a major constraint working against public libraries and preventing them from achieving their full potential 'to information-enable' Australians.[4] In evidence to

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1   *Submission 126,* p. 7.

2   See, for example, Joint Library Advisory Committee, Newcastle Region Library, *Submission 100,* p. [4]; Metropolitan Public Libraries Association, *Submission 114,* p. [4]; Australian Subject Gateways Forum, *Submission 75,* p. 4.

3   *Submission 117,* p. 21.

4   *Submission 3,* p. 2.

the Committee, he pointed out the desirability of a unified national approach to libraries, drawing together the loose ends residing in different jurisdictions. He added:

> Although the National Library does play a leadership role, it does not have the mandate to play the role that a national commission for libraries and information services plays in the US, plays in the UK and looks as though it is going to play in New Zealand.[5]

4.5   The Committee notes that the Howard Government has not been disposed in the past to accept recommendations that it develop a national library or information policy. In its formal response to a 1991 report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies, *Australia as an Information Society: the role of libraries/information networks,* it stated:

> A national information policy would quickly become out of date and would not have the flexibility to meet changing needs and circumstances.[6]

The response further indicated that the government was satisfied with de facto national library policies developed by the library community and felt that the development and provision of library services could well be managed by the Cultural Ministers Council and the Online Government Council.

4.6   The Committee has observed, and its observations have been reinforced by the libraries and others who gave evidence to it, that libraries seem to be the poor relations when it comes to attention from these councils or from NOIE. While initially such neglect was perhaps understandable in the enthusiasm to spread the IT message and get Australia 'connected', it is less so now that there is a growing realisation that what constitutes genuine access to information transcends connectivity.

4.7   The lack of a single federal entity with responsibility for information policy was an issue frequently raised with the Committee. NOIE was regarded by many as too close to the ICT sector. As Ms Swan of Information Edge told the Committee:

> I think NOIE could possibly be expanded to make sure that it has the necessary skills and advocates involved to push the knowledge. What we are really talking about here is the delivery of knowledge via libraries in an online world. Unless you have somebody who understands how knowledge is harnessed in an online world – how it gets into databases, who delivers it, what the quality of the databases is, how much they cost and all those things – you could not do it necessarily with the current people involved. But as long as NOIE was expanded to include those skills, fine ...[7]

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5   *Evidence,* p. 344.

6   Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communications and the Arts, Government response to the report, '*Australia as an Information Society*', tabled 15 May 1997.

7   *Evidence*, p. 419

4.8   The Committee supports in principle the notion of a broad national information policy. But unless hard funds were to be attached to it, it would be merely aspirational. Nor does the Committee feel disposed to advocate adding layers of bureaucracy. It recognises that the library voice is somewhat diluted at present in federal fora and believes that the time has come for the Cultural Ministers' Council to again turn its attention to libraries and to consider again the need for a national information policy statement.

4.9   In saying this, the Committee is aware that the Cultural Ministers' Council established a National Collections Advisory Forum in 2002, comprising nine members, including one librarian. The Forum was to bring both industry and community perspectives to Australian, State and Territory Ministers on policy and planning for the gallery, library, archives and museums sectors with regard to the Distributed National Collection. It was stressed that leadership and national coordination of strategic initiatives are essential to the longer-term development of the sector; the Forum was to report to the Council within 12 months on the feasibility or otherwise of establishing a national industry body to represent the library, archives, museum and gallery sectors.

4.10   In the view of the Committee, this is a valuable initiative but one with too broad an agenda to be of assistance to the pressing needs of libraries now. It therefore recommends**:**

  (a) that the Cultural Ministers' Council appoint a standing libraries working group to provide regular reports on library and information matters which need to be addressed as a priority;

  (b) that the proposed Cultural Ministers' Council standing libraries working group develop, in consultation with other interested parties, a national information policy; and,

  (c) that NOIE be required to consult with the appropriate national library representatives on all matters of substance affecting the library community and the online provision of services.

Connectivity and bandwidth

4.11   Libraries and library systems around the country operate in very different circumstances, by reason of geography, funding, and in some cases, historical accident. While online access is increasingly, though not universally, available in libraries, the quality of that access, how it is achieved, and its cost, varies considerably and results in huge disparities in service levels across Australia. At the one extreme, there are a number of areas in far north Queensland such as Croydon, Burketown, Cape York and the Torres Strait without a reliable electricity supply and for whom any kind of online interaction is problematic.[8]   In metropolitan areas particularly,

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8   *Submission 103,* p. [4].

where access per se is no longer such a major issue, access reliability and cost are the current challenges, as is the matter of bandwidth.

4.12   In its submission to the Committee's inquiry, NOIE summed up the bandwidth issue:

> Bandwidth capacity is likely to be a major issue for libraries both now and into the future as the expectations and demands of library users become increasingly sophisticated in terms of their access to online information and services. Public Internet access via narrowband connections will not enable users to access content and applications involving large files, photos, graphics, video, online courses, games, etc.[9]

4.13   NOIE indicated that at April 2002, while 57 per cent had narrowband home Internet access, only an estimated six per cent had broadband access and that broadband Internet access 'may be beyond the reach of many Australians for some time to come' and hence public libraries and other community organisations were likely to play an important role in the provision of public access to online information and services into the future. NOIE went on to add:

> The challenge for the library sector and for State and Local Government funding agencies will be to respond to future demands and acquire the necessary bandwidth at an affordable price.[10]

4.14   While dial-up Internet access is almost universally available, it is simply not adequate for library user needs. High speed Internet access is available through a range of technologies, including ADSL, ISDN and satellite. At the end of 2002, ADSL was available at some 260 rural exchanges; its limitation, however, is that it is only appropriate for those within 3.5 cable kilometres of an enabled exchange. Telstra is testing 'mini' ASDL devices which will extend this range. The ISDN option, with extension, may work up to 18 kilometres from the exchange, and provides 128 kbps. Beyond that, satellite is so far the only real option.

4.15   International surveys show that broadband access costs in Australia are quite high by world standards. The International Telecommunications Union in a recent publication, *Birth of Broadband,* reported that Australia was the seventh most expensive country for broadband access of the 30 major nations surveyed, as assessed by percentage of monthly income required to download 100 kilobits: 0.44 per cent in Australai compared with 0.12 per cent in the USA. The most affordable broadband services were in Japan, Korea, Belgium, Hong Kong, Singapore and the United States. The survey also confirmed the relatively low rate of broadband use in Australia, which

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

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

ranked 29th on the table of 30 countries in terms of broadband subscribers, with only 1.4 per 100 inhabitants.[11]

4.16   In the following paragraphs, the Committee considers some of the Internet choices various libraries have made, the problems they have encountered, their levels of satisfaction, and the costs involved.

4.17   Mrs Schmidmaier, NSW State Librarian, explained to the Committee that in some cases in the IT roll-out to rural libraries, they had found that the local telephone exchanges could not cope with the connections they wanted to put in. Even in the Australian Government-funded Rural Link program to provide connectivity to small communities of less than 2,000 people, difficulties were being experienced with a whole range of technologies including satellite and wireless.[12] Mrs Schmidmaier estimated that half the towns selected were affected by technical barriers, but that negotiations were underway with Telstra to upgrade facilities.[13]

4.18   Because of the relatively short distances involved, metropolitan libraries are technically able to use ADSL networks. Yarra-Melbourne moved to an ASDL network in 2001 and found it much more reliable and faster, and generating fewer complaints.[14] Holroyd Library in Western Sydney, which at the time of its submission to the Committee had a 64kbps ISDN line, has considered its upgrade options. To increase to a 256kbps connection would cost over $40,000 p.a. and only give 20 concurrent users a speed equivalent to a 19.2kbps modem. ASDL would provide sufficient speed to allow users to use the Internet productively but use cannot be capped, so the library could find itself severely over budget if users downloaded too much.[15]

4.19   In Victoria, a division of the State Library, VICNET, supplies infrastructure and bandwidth to most of the public libraries on a cost-recovery basis, while the Rural Libraries Online project provides satellite access to key points within public libraries in rural Victoria. Mr John Murrell of the West Gippsland Regional Library Service told the Committee that to improve broadband access to the eight of the 12 static libraries in his region via microwave or wireless links would cost $900,000.[16]. Mr Elwin of the Wimmera Regional Library Corporation explained that they use a Telstra ADSL broadband service to the two largest centres, Horsham and Stawell, but were unable to extend it to other centres such as St Arnaud as Telstra would not modify the

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11   As quoted in Crowe, D, *Broadband costs among world's highest,* Australian Financial Review, 18 Sep 2003.

12   *Evidence,* pp. 105-06.

13   *Evidence,* p. 110.

14   *Evidence,* p. 28.

15   *Submission 52,* p. 6.

16   *Evidence,* p. 19.

local exchange unless they could guarantee 20 commercial customers.[17] Ms Makin, representing the Public Libraries Association, said her Wodonga-based pilot project funded through NTN cost $8.58 a megabit for data, or about $7,000 a month to keep two mobile libraries operating Internet access.[18]

4.20   In NSW, NSW.net subsidised Internet access for the smaller regional libraries. In the case of Central Murray, the true cost of ISDN was $750 a month; but with the subsidy, they paid only $333. This gives them 3 gigabytes, but as they are using more than that, they are moving to ADSL via NSW.net. But for the Mathoura branch, only a dial-up 56K modem link was available and there was no prospect of any improvement.[19]

4.21   Turning to examples from Queensland, the Whitsunday Shire Council spent $70,000 to put in a fibre-optic link within Proserpine; but connections to Cannonvale library using Telstra ISDN were not good, at $5000 p.a.[20]

4.22   South Australian libraries originally went into providing Internet access through NTN funds, with a statewide Wide Area Network. In its submission to the Committee, the central Public Libraries Automated Information Network, or PLAIN, indicated it was then investigating moving from ISDN access to ADSL and satellite technology. Witnesses told the Committee that they were spending nearly $900,000 on Internet access for a two-megabyte link, and were about to upgrade to a five-megabyte link, 'But we know that, as soon as we put that five-meg link in, all our users will just use that to capacity as well – what they were downloading in 10 minutes they will be able to download in one minute – so for us it is almost a never-ending goal.'[21]

4.23   Given the volume of Internet use public libraries represent, the Committee investigated whether any favourable treatment had been able to be negotiated. Mr Bertie of the State Library of Victoria told the Committee:

> One of the activities of VICNET is to supply infrastructure and bandwidth to most of the public libraries in Victoria. We have had very limited success with the major telecommunications companies in getting anything like the American concept of an e-rate, a reduced rate for a public institution. We have had success working in partnerships with some of the major communications suppliers, where they are prepared to join us as a

17   *Evidence,* p. 186.

18   *Evidence,* p. 439.

19   *Evidence,* p. 217.

20   *Evidence,* p. 251.

21   *Evidence,* p. 364.

> commercial exercise ... Suppliers have been very willing to enter into negotiations, join us and work with us, because we have the aggregation.[22]

4.24   Mr Hardy of Monash University was not hopeful of progress, telling the Committee, 'the carriers ... in our experience are a fairly hard-hearted bunch'.[23] The experience of the representatives of the newly-formed Public Libraries Association was that they have been talking to Telstra, but had encountered a chicken and egg situation - they needed a network before they could get a discount, but they also needed some promises of a discount to establish an Australia-wide network of potentially 1700 public libraries, which would provide the critical mass the states lacked.[24]

4.25   It is clear that the bandwidth expectations of public library users are higher now. As the Monash survey indicated, some 47 per cent of users wanted to download music but couldn't.[25] The Shorelink libraries, using Telstra frame relay and HDSL, exceeded the 10-gigabyte capacity within a year and when they upgraded to a 20-gigabyte line, they had instances of exceeding capacity within the first three months of the upgrade. They have no download cap, and are required to pay a higher marginal rate if they exceed their contracted capacity.

4.26   Public libraries are under enormous pressure to continue to invest in expensive ICT infrastructure to meet the demand for broadband speed and not all are coping. The Municipal Association of Victoria told the Committee that certain libraries – Swan Hill, North Central Goldfields, Wimmera and Campaspe - in rural Victoria could not afford the ongoing maintenance costs of rack equipment associated with the recent satellite technology rollout.[26]

4.27   Mr Hardy of Monash University summed up the issue:

> the key issue for public libraries ... is bandwidth. There really needs to be some way of either getting a discounted bandwidth provision to the library systems of Australia or some way of assisting them to aggregate their demand so that they can bring that bandwidth cost down. From talking to my colleagues at VICNET, I know they are putting bigger pipes into the libraries. I think the average rate of increase in bandwidth use across the libraries in the last few months has been something like nine per cent. The bigger the pipe, the more people will use it but, unfortunately, the more the libraries have to pay.[27]

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22   *Evidence,* p. 35.

23   *Evidence,* p. 61.

24   *Evidence,* p. 433.

25   *Evidence,* p. 58.

26   *Submission 124,* p. 4.

27   *Evidence,* p. 56.

4.28   As the Committee noted in Chapter 1, the Australian Government recognised its responsibilities in getting Australia online through the Networking the Nation initiative and the Social Bonus funds. There may be an ongoing role for the Australian Government in this area. The Committee heard the views of Dr Williamson of the Library Board of Victoria:

> the online environment is so complex and requires such infrastructure that there is an obvious role for the Commonwealth to play, particularly in the funding and development of the infrastructure ... It is not to relinquish the significant resource development that has already happened and the significant level of cooperation among libraries but to recognise that in the new environment and the online environment there is a role for national coordination and national leadership, which I think logically and sensibly sits with Commonwealth government.[28]

4.29   Similarly, CASL Chairman Mrs Awcock stated:

> there is very unequal distribution of online access across the nation. We think it is fundamental to get it right, and that definitely seems to be a Commonwealth responsibility. If we can fix up the telecommunications across the country so that people in Warnambool and Darwin and Western Australia from one end to the other right across to Queensland and New South Wales and down to Tasmania have all got a similar opportunity to access the online resources – to find information through retrieval systems, through availability, to use it and evaluate it – then we are much better off as a nation.[29]

4.30   Ms Halliday, Director of the State Library of South Australia, pointed out that online services were in demand in libraries, and libraries were a trusted source of information, with staff trained to help, but those libraries required access to 'affordable, fast and appropriate bandwidth'; federal government support was critical to make that bandwidth available.[30]

4.31   The Committee supports the principle of equitable access to online services for all communities in Australia, including the provision of appropriate public access Internet terminals with broadband access. It believes that, through its constitutional responsibility for telecommunications, the Australian Government has a role in achieving this. While the NTN initiative was successful in getting the ball rolling, its limited recognition of the possibilities offered by the network of public libraries as sites for online access was regrettable, in hindsight. Further, it was perhaps overly optimistic to expect that ongoing running costs and technology upgrades could and would be funded by local government. And this is at a time when the demand for online access has accelerated, and when government provision of government

28   *Evidence,* p. 37.

29   *Evidence,* p. 40.

30   *Evidence,* p. 335.

information through the online medium has also accelerated. Local government can legitimately feel it has been left holding the baby. With Australians' fondness for the adoption of new technology, it is highly likely, in the longer term, that private broadband Internet access will become relatively commonplace. It is unlikely ever to be universal, so public access will always be required. In the interests of equity, and in recognition of the fact that states and local government are not equally in a position to meet the vastly differing costs of provision of online access, it is incumbent upon the Australian Government to continue its support.

4.32   How best to provide that support equitably is a difficult question. The Committee considered whether in the first instance, and as a stop-gap measure, a renewed round of NTN grants might be required. It acknowledges that recurrent funding would be more desirable, but difficult to achieve in the present economic climate. If the government were disposed to follow this path, preference should be given to rural and regional communities which are prepared or able to co-locate services in any meaningful way to each community: for example, library-online access centre; library-school; library-community centre-rural transaction centre. Other priority candidates would be rural and regional communities having major technological problems with access now.

4.33   A possible approach for ensuring affordable broadband for public access in libraries would be the extension of universal service obligations. Under such an approach, a national tender for the provision of such services could be advertised, with the cost borne as a levy on all telecommunications carriers. A difficulty with this approach would be that telecommunications technology is advancing at such a pace – and with it demand for broadband - that any requirement could be out of date within a very short period of time. The need to provide broadband to different centres not currently served by terrestrial broadband links might further complicate this issue.

4.34   The Committee notes that the United States has established a low cost price for public library Internet access. The Committee considers that there is a reasonable case for requiring telecommunications suppliers to offer an e-rate, or special discount, to schools and libraries, based on the United States experience. To date, broadband access for libraries has been funded mostly through government funding programs. However, as these programs (e.g. Networking the Nation) have tended to be one-off or of limited duration, they have not provided a viable long-term funding source for what is a rapidly growing cost item for overstretched libraries.

4.35   The Committee recommends:

  (a) that the government negotiate with telecommunications carriers to establish an 'e-rate' or discount rate for broadband access to public libraries and that, if negotiations are not successful, consider imposing a requirement on carriers under the Universal Services Obligation arrangement; and,

  (b) that further funds be allocated under an expanded National Broadband Strategy for expanding broadband access in libraries.

Intellectual property issues

4.36   As the Copyright Agency Ltd (CAL) told the Committee, the objective of protecting the private rights of copyright owners through copyright is 'to enrich society and the public good by encouraging and fostering original cultural, educational and scientific expression'. CAL supports the continuing need to protect copyright works, in order to encourage intellectual creative effort and investment, but also recognises the need for exceptions to copyright for the public benefit.

4.37   The need for such public benefit exceptions from copyright has been recognised internationally, initially in Article 9(2) of the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, and subsequently in the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) Agreement (part of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and the WIPO Copyright Treaty 1996, to all of which Australia is a party. These agreements outline a three-steps test to identify legitimate exceptions to copyright owners' rights, namely:

- they apply only in special cases;

- they do not conflict with the normal exploitation of the work; and

- they do not unreasonably prejudice the legitimate interests of the author.

4.38   Copyright in Australia is governed by the federal Copyright Act 1968. Major changes to this legislation were required when photocopying became cheap and widely available, a situation which has some similarities with the present digital revolution. Following a 1976 review, library exemptions were included in the legislation, allowing, amongst other things, the free copying of a 'reasonable portion' (up to 10 per cent) of a work, plus the copying of entire works in circumstances where copies were not commercially available.

4.39   It has been recognised that in the electronic environment, there is a far greater potential for copyright to be infringed. The question was closely examined in the late 1990s by, amongst others, the Copyright Law Review Committee and proposed government amendments to the legislation were reviewed by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. In its explanatory memorandum to the Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Bill 1999, the government outlined its general position, that 'libraries and archives should be able to use the new technologies to provide access to copyright material for the general community, as long as the economic rights of owners of copyright material are not unreasonably prejudiced'. Others feared that the bill would permit libraries to become documentary delivery services on a commercial scale, avoiding copyright. Providing certain copyright exemptions for for-profit libraries was also hotly contested.

4.40   The Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 was enacted, taking effect from March 2001. Amongst other things, it permits libraries to reproduce works digitally for 'administrative' purposes; to make a digital preservation copy of a work, (provided that users cannot make electronic copies thereof); and to make digitally

published articles available online to a client, again so long as they are not further digitally reproduced or communicated. A library may copy or communicate to another library an electronic article, or a part of a work, for two purposes: to include in that library's collection; or to supply to a client for research or study purposes. It may not provide an article or part of a work that is commercially available on its own.

4.41   In the view of the Australian Copyright Council, 'Australia has a comparatively generous set of library provisions' compared with other countries.[31] The Committee, however, is inclined to the view that the current balance between the rights of copyright owners and access to information by users in the digital environment is an acceptable one, and that the current 'fair dealing' exceptions in current copyright legislation should not be overridden by contract provisions in licences for online resources.

4.42   After the 1975 *Moorhouse* case, libraries have been wary of being sued for failing to 'police' their users closely with regard to those users' activities in possible breach of copyright at photocopiers or, now, via scanners and email. The Digital Agenda Act lessens their concerns, by providing that libraries will not be held liable for copyright infringement by users, provided that appropriate signage is in place.[32] However libraries are right to be cautious, following the recent high-profile legal challenges over MP$_3$.com and Napster in the USA.

4.43   In the Committee's view, rather than seeking protection solely in legislation which is inevitably a slow process, copyright owners should continue to look to technology to protect their interests, if they fear they are under threat. The Committee was told of many innovative methods being used to protect material, including 'fingerprinting', 'tagging' and anti-copying devices[33] and viewing for time-limited periods.[34]

4.44   In this context, the Committee notes the growing number of commercial online services which make copyright payments for the reproduction and communication of copyright works: ABIX; EdResearch Online; Infotrieve; Informit; ilanetweb; ProQuest; and many others. Informit, for example, is the online service provider from RMIT Publishing and is the largest Australian database provider, offering three subscription-based full-text online services; ilanetweb is a business unit of the State Library of New South Wales which provides access to web-based database services on a pay-as-you-go basis.

4.45   Section 210 of the Copyright Act requires the legal deposit, without charge, of certain types of published material with the National Library of Australia. Similar

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31   *Submission* 128, (attachment), p. 1.

32   *Submission* 128 (attachment), p. 27.

33   *Submission* 128 (attachment), p. 9.

34   Mr Taylor, *Submission 72,* p. 4.

legislation exists in the states, in respect of the state libraries. This is to attempt to ensure that comprehensive collections of published material are maintained for posterity. But the requirement to deposit does not currently extend to digital material. In Victorian legislation, for example, the Committee was told, a 'publication' is defined as a physical item.[35] Representative of the National Library of Australia explained the difficulties this presented for the PANDORA project (described in Chapter 3) as the library had to seek the permission of website owners to capture and archive the material. They noted that while most owners were cooperative, not all were.[36]

4.46   Representatives of the National Library told the committee that it was currently seeking the extension of legal deposit to cover digital material.[37] While supportive of the general concept, the Committee notes that there are a large number of issues to be resolved, not least the matter of storage, and clarification of the place of origin of a website. It further notes the divergence of views on the matter between the relevant Australian Government departments. As Ms Fullerton, Director-General of the National Library, told the Committee:

> we have support from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts – their intellectual property people are supporting the extension of legal deposit to cover [digital] material. We are aware that the Attorney-General's Department is not of the same mind at this stage, but we hope that they may be persuaded.[38]

4.47   In its inquiry, the Committee did not consider the question of legal deposit in sufficient detail to form a definitive view on the matter of its extension to digital material. It notes, however, that the requirement that the *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000* be reviewed after three years of operation and recommends that that review consider this issue.

Licence agreements

4.48   The online revolution has brought with it enormous changes in publishing practice, to which libraries have had to adjust. Whereas in the recent past, a library might have held print subscriptions to a certain number of journals, it may no longer find it financially possible to maintain the increasingly high cost of hard copy. And, in certain cases, hard copy may no longer be available. Suppliers now offer online 'deals', offering, for example, online subscriptions for 90 per cent of the print cost or, at a modestly higher cost, access to many more online titles as well. But these licence agreements come with conditions attached. They typically restrict access to specific users, and in some cases, to specific sites – in the case of university libraries, which

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35   *Evidence,* p. 33.

36   *Evidence,* p. 98.

37   *Evidence,* p. 98.

38   *Evidence,* p. 99.

are the most severely affected by the change, access is allowed to current members of the university community, namely the staff and students. Members of the public or even university alumni who may have access to the university library no longer have access to the online subscriptions, unless the library has the infrastructure in place to register the person as a guest, or visitor, or unless the library is prepared to do the search for the visitor. It is unclear how common this latter practice is.[39]

4.49   Licence agreements have also played havoc with university libraries' reciprocal borrowing schemes.

4.50   Further problems are experienced by students who cannot access their parent library because they are located elsewhere. Medical students doing their obligatory year in a teaching hospital are a case in point, with library staff at times having to go to great lengths to convince journal publishers that there are authentication processes in place in hospital libraries to exclude the non-students from access to online journals to which the university only has subscribed.

4.51   The online subscription costs are substantial. Newcastle University pays nearly three-quarters of a million dollars per annum for ScienceDirect. And they take up an increasing proportion of the library resource budget – in the case of the Queensland University of Technology, from 15 per cent in 1996 to 56 per cent in 2002.[40] The Auchmuty Library at the University of Newcastle moved from around 5,000 print subscriptions three years ago to packages of over 35,000 online subscriptions, a valuable increase in content but which they can offer to a more restricted group of users.[41]

4.52   Public libraries are unlikely ever to be in a position to purchase access to highly specialised publications and nor are small employers. So when students graduate, they may be extremely limited in their capacity to stay up to date, legally, via the library sector. Rather than encourage graduates to overcome this lacuna by sourcing publications from university colleagues, possibly in breach of copyright, many university libraries have suggested that national site licences for suites of journals should be negotiated.[42] The Committee notes that this is the case for academic libraries in Canada, for example.

4.53   The Committee notes that some overseas jurisdictions, including Finland and certain US states, have entered into contracts with online publishers that provide access to all residents in their jurisdiction. The Committee further notes that the Australian Government's Department of Heath and Ageing has started the ball rolling in Australia by approving a national subscription to allow free public Internet access

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39   See, for example, *Evidence,* p. 262.

40   *Evidence,* p. 297.

41   *Evidence,* p. 450.

42   See, for example, *Evidence,* p. 310.

to the internationally respected Cochrane Library of medical information. As the minister noted when announcing the decision, Australians will now be able to read for themselves on www.update-software.com/cochrane/ the best and the latest evidence and to use that information to make informed health care choices.[43] The Australian Government-owned National Institute of Clinical Studies manages and pays for the subscription, having been granted Australian Government funding for that specific purpose.

4.54   Not all witnesses were equally enthusiastic about national site licencing, however. While recognising that 42 Australian universities have better bargaining power than one, Ms Clark of the University of Ballarat feared that vendors might increase prices when faced with a purchaser monopoly. She nevertheless agreed that, whatever the downsides, national site licencing was 'the only way to deal with the equity issues in terms of information provision'.[44]

4.55   Not all publishers or suppliers are amenable to licence agreements which permit unlimited yearly use for a one-off fee. Dr Bundy highlighted the very real problem of databases which have a 'per use' cost associated with them, as it is so difficult for libraries to control costs. However valuable the information such databases might contain, most libraries avoid them if they can, in preference for more popular consortia-purchased – and therefore cheaper – resources.[45] There are, however, many developments which may lessen the problems. As the licencing market matures, subscribers are much more aware of the conditions which are acceptable and those which are not. With the added financial clout of consortia purchasing, there is more prospect of being able to negotiate improved terms and conditions.

4.56   The Committee recommends:

(a) that the National Library identify a number of key databases for which national site licencing might be desirable; and,

(b) that additional Australian Government funding be extended to the National Library for this purpose.

Australian online content

4.57   For academic and research libraries, there is another related matter to be considered. It is often, implicitly or explicitly, a condition of academic advancement that academics publish in peer-reviewed journals. And these journals are increasing only available, in practical terms, via online subscription as the cost of hard copy is

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43   Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, *Access to international research for all Australians,* media release 15 July 2002.

44   *Evidence,* p. 179.

45   *Evidence,* p. 363.

untenable. To all intents and purposes, government funded research may often just disappear. As Ms Swan of Information Edge told the Committee, 'Our research is done, paid for and virtually thrown away.'[46]

4.58   The problem has been recognised for some time, including in the federal government's paper, *Backing Australia's Ability: an innovative action plan for the future*, released in 2001, and the Chief Scientist's 2000 report, *The Chance to Change.* Advice was sought from, inter alia, the Higher Education Information Infrastructure Advisory Committee, which reported in November 2002.[47] That report noted the problems also drawn to the Committee's attention:

> Development of the national research information infrastructure has been somewhat uncoordinated and largely regarded as the responsibility of indvidual institutions. Collaboration among libraries has improved the effectiveness of institutional investment and, combined with access to libraries internationally, provides some Australian researchers with the majority of published information required for their research.
>
> This access is not universal and some researchers, particularly those at smaller or regional institutions and those in specialised or emerging disciplines, often have difficulty accessing required information resources. Their difficulties are compounded by changes which are occurring in the scholarly communication process. Although there are now improved mechanisms for discovering the existence of information resources, access to them is often restricted by cost, licences and other conditions.[48]

4.59   The report noted the growth, internationally, of attempts by academics to regain control of scholarly publishing, such as the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. It further noted that technologies now exist to revolutionise the ways in which research information is created, manipulated and published. Priorities it advanced included subject gateways, research information skills training, e-print repositories, digital theses and e-publishing of Australian research. Key messages were that Australia should not act unilaterally as its combined output was too small to influence the international scholarly communication environment; that there needed to be national coordination and setting of priorities; and that there needed to be considerable government investment to ensure progress – the sum of $20 million was advocated.[49]

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46   *Evidence,* p. 419.

47   Higher Education Information Infrastructure Advisory Committee, *Research Information Infrastructure Framework for Australian Higher Education: final report.* November 2002.

48   ibid., 1.4-1.5.

49   ibid., 1.16.

4.60   The advisory committee metamorphosed into an implementation steering committee, which reported in May 2003[50] and which recommended, inter alia, the formation of yet another committee. On 14 August 2003, the Minister for Education, Science and Training announced the formation of the Australian Research Information Infrastructure Committee (ARIIC) to 'act on recommendations ... for managing and using the vast amounts of research information generated by Australia's universities and other research institutions' and committing funding of $22 million for 2003-04.[51]

4.61   While the Committee has some reservations about the extent of the deliberative process, as opposed to actual action on the ground, it welcomes the funding committed to improving access to Australian information resources. It notes that the pace of technological change will always mean that today's information access solutions will be suboptimal tomorrow, but that should not mean action is always deferred.

4.62   Apart from these developments in the academic sphere, federal government agencies themselves produce a large number of databases and other publications which, it is contended, should be available free of charge to all Australians, who have already paid for them once, through their taxes. The Committee was told that one such database, Streamline, was even threatened with closure before obtaining a last minute reprieve. While many departments have quite comprehensive web sites, providing links to large numbers of their publications, other government agencies are limited in what they provide online. Nor does there appear to be any uniformity in what is made available or for how long. One notable and commendable exception is the Australian Bureau of Statistics, whose library extension program was warmly regarded by all.

4.63   In another development, the closure of the Australian Government bookshops was announced in the May 2003 federal Budget. This decision was taken primarily to cut costs, the tradeoff being faster and free access online. As Ms Swan of Information Edge told the Committee, however, online versions of the massive reports issued by agencies such as the Productivity Commission are not practical to download and are all but impossible to handle online.

4.64   In a related development, the Committee is aware that a Legislative Instruments Bill is currently before the federal Parliament. The purpose of the legislation is to bring together all Australian Government legislative instruments in a register which will be freely accessible online. This is perhaps a tacit recognition that, in their totality, these instruments have never been readily available, through the bookstores or elsewhere; it is also a recognition of the basic principle that Australians have a right to be able to find what the law is without major difficulty.

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50   Report of the Higher Education Information Infrastructure Implementation Steering Committee, 19 May 2003, http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/otherpub/heiiisc03/default.htm

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

4.65   The Committee understands that NOIE has been tasked with developing a register which will include the existing publications held by the bookshops and will provide linkages to departmental publishing sites, including to the proposed legislative instruments register. It is seeking to develop agreed standards for the description of the information across agencies and to ascertain the most appropriate search mechanisms. The Committee further understands that NOIE will go ahead with an initial version of its register and improve it over time, rather than wait for the perfect technological solution at some indeterminate time in the future. The Committee recommends:

(a) that NOIE continue to consult closely with the library community over the development of the register of Australian Government publications;

(b) that NOIE publicise the availability in public libraries of the online register; and,

(c) that NOIE commission research to ascertain the level of public awareness of government information and the means of access thereto.

Seamless access

4.66   By and large, library users at all levels do not want to have to juggle multiple passwords to access databases, or to remember different searching strategies. Information which is simple to access will be used, even if it is inferior to what might be available with greater effort.[52] While libraries at all levels are actively engaged in developing and running programs to assist users to come to grips with the intricacies of the online revolution, they have accepted the inevitable that they need to put in an equivalent effort into making a diverse range of information easier to access.

4.67   To some extent, by simply putting it online and trusting to the efficacy of general search engines, they have won part of the battle. In 1999-2000, all 20,970 items in the Sir William Dixson Collection of Printed Books had electronic records created for them and usage of the collection has increased by 400 per cent since that time.[53] But only a modest proportion of available online information can be accessed in this way, with the contents of what is sometimes known as the 'deep Web' accessible only through other approaches.

4.68   Some 20 years ago an international standard, Z39.50, was developed by database vendors to enable users to perform a single search of multiple databases and to receive intelligible responses at the desktop. A more recent development is XML, which provides interoperability between systems, giving a standard format and a standard layout so that any document that has been created in XML can be downloaded – the old problems of a site created by an Apple computer and failing to

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52   See comments from University of South Australia Library, *Submission 32,* p. 5.

53   *Submission 130,* p. 12.

be accessed by using an IBM web server are, in theory, a thing of the past.[54] And new technologies are constantly evolving.

4.69   Although much work has already been done to facilitate access to government websites, problems remain. The Committee was told, and from its own experience is aware, that www.gov.au is 'a nightmare to search'.[55]   Ms Parer of James Cook University Library elaborated on the need for the right infrastructure – not just the fibre optics and the channels, but the search engines. She did not believe the government had an appropriate search engine across all of its online web sites to enable users to search for government information easily.[56] As the Committee noted above, NOIE is working to rectify this. The Committee encourages it to do so as a matter of some priority.

Online services and charges for users

4.70   Most public libraries are legally constrained by their enabling legislation to provide 'core' services free of charge. Depending on the relative affluence, or philosophical bent, of each library, some make extremely generous provisions for all their users, well over and above core services, while others charge usually modest amounts for 'non-core' services. In between lie the libraries where staff use their discretion about who to charge, and for what.

4.71   From what the Committee has been able to gather, access to the Internet is free, generally speaking, in all states but Queensland and Tasmania, where modest charges are levied. In the Burdekin Shire, for example, charges were $2.20 per half hour. In South Australia, a local authority could elect to impose charges but would lose its state government subsidy.[57] In some cases, free access is provided to some services but not others, with the City of Sydney charging $2 per hour for general Internet searching but nothing if the search is restricted to available databases or if the library staff do it.[58] Some libraries permit users to download to disks or to email search results to themselves at home or work, while others, particularly smaller library services such as the Central Highlands Regional Library Corporation, do not allow users to bring in their own disks as they do not have adequate virus-checking capacity.[59]   Most provide printing and word processing facilities, but only some charge for them. Still others provide different services at different terminals, with the Western Australian State Library having seven terminals for unlimited Internet searching and 43 with restricted access to the library catalogue and selected databases. Almost all operate booking systems, for varying amounts of Internet access time, from

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54   *Evidence*, p. 395.

55   *Evidence,* p. 415.

56   *Evidence,* p. 270.

57   *Evidence,* p. 345.

58   *Evidence,* p. 113.

59   *Evidence,* p. 160.

one day to one week in advance. Some libraries charge modest amounts for training in Internet use, such as $3 at Wingecarribee Shire Library, though it appears that the majority provides free one-on-one training or assistance.

4.72   By and large, the librarians who gave evidence to the Committee were staunch advocates for the free provision of online services in general. Mr Strempel, of CLASA, told the Committee:

> Given the fact that taxpayers have paid once for their library, we do not think that they should have to pay twice by having to download information at a cost. It is no different from lending them a book in that sense.[60]

4.73   In a similar vein Ms Forte, WA State Librarian, told the Committee, 'It certainly is a fundamental principle of public libraries that access to information in all its forms should be free to citizens and that there should be equity of access to that information.'[61]

4.74   While the Committee is in wholehearted agreement with the broad principle of free access, it is increasingly obvious that there have to be limits. The role of a public library is not to enable its patrons to download the latest blockbuster. Even universities are having to watch ICT usage. The Committee was informed that Newcastle University has implemented a monitoring process whereby all students must register before they use any online service; their quantum of usage is monitored and anyone who exceeds reasonable use is brought in for questioning.[62]

4.75   Free access was universally permitted for at least one category of users, namely job-seekers using the Jobsearch network. The Committee notes that even here, one library has placed time limits on the use of the Jobsearch network, albeit fairly generous ones of 90 minutes access per person per week.[63]

4.76   The provision of free email services is one of the more contentious 'user pays' issues. In the Committee's experience, a slim majority of the library services which provided evidence to this inquiry levied charges for the use of email from library terminals. The State Librarian of NSW was one to express the view forcefully that the library's focus was on providing information access, not a postal service; after finding out that backpacker hostels were putting up signs telling visitors to do their email at the State Library, she has ensured that Hotmail access has been restricted to a terminal in the library cafe.[64]

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60   *Evidence,* p. 366.

61   *Evidence,* p. 387.

62   *Evidence,* p. 461.

63   *Evidence,* p. 323.

64   *Evidence,* p. 113.

4.77   Caloundra City Libraries representative, Ms Bauer, expressed a view espoused by many of the smaller libraries that email was a 'perfectly legitimate' use of library facilities. Her libraries provide a free 15-minute Internet terminal which is widely used for email purposes, and they also provide training in email use. Many older users learn to use the Internet solely to send emails, but they do so in the public library because they feel comfortable there in a community learning environment.[65]

4.78   The Committee tends to the view that email is not a core service of public libraries, which do not, after all, provide free telephones for their patrons' use. It recognises that the provision of email and assistance in its use is an inducement to many non-Internet users to 'give it a try' and is a good starting point for other online activities. It also sympathises with the view advanced so eloquently by Dr Bundy, that 'once you start delving into issues about whether a tourist coming in to use the Internet should be charged for email ... you get into very murky waters', that charging for email was penny-pinching, and that the public relations value of free email was tremendous, and at minimal cost.[66]

4.79   Clearly, the exact nature of the services provided, the core/non-core divide and the charges levied or not levied are not uniform across the country. The Committee is of the view that the relevant library representative organisations should regularly issue statements relating to the basic level of provision to which each library, whatever the requirements of its enabling legislation, should strive to attain. The Committee's basic position is that no Australian should be denied access to the world wide web through an inability to pay. It recognises, however, that uncapped use of the Internet in the library situation is untenable, and modest charges may be required in some circumstances to control demand. Equity target groups should of course be excluded from such charges.

4.80   However one views the philosophical desirability of requiring users to pay for the non-core services they use, it seems to the Committee that the administrative costs of collecting small amounts of money might outweigh the practical benefits of modest charging regimes. It notes, however, that most libraries have already coped with this issue when they instituted charging regimes for overdue books, and have persisted with the practice, though perhaps with a deterrence agenda in mind. If technology, in the form of smart cards or other devices, lessens the administrative burden of handling small amounts of money, then the acceptability of modest charging regimes might increase.

Funding

4.81   As the Committee reported in Chapter 1, the federal government's contribution to libraries is primarily concentrated on the university libraries and the National Library, whereas the states' overall contribution to public libraries is about

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65   *Evidence,* p. 327.

66   *Evidence,* p. 345.

one-third of that of local government, with quite extensive variation between the states. States also fund their state libraries. The Committee endeavoured to find out whether library funding, from whatever source, was trending upwards, downwards, or remaining stable in line with inflation; it also considered whether current demands on libraries required addition funding or merely reprioritisation of existing funding. And, given the divided responsibility for library funding, the Committee also considered if, and if so how, any change could or should be brought about. Much evidence it received was anecdotal but at least reflects the perceptions of the managers concerned.

4.82   Dr Bundy pointed out to the Committee that public libraries in Australia were highly dependent on the public purse, with government funding as a percentage of total income ranging from 89.1 per cent in Victoria to 97.8 per cent in Tasmania.[67] Library income raised from user charges, bequest funding or corporate sponsorship is insignificant. Dr Bundy has calculated that the total annual cost of public library provision in Australia is about $560 million, or about 6 cents per person per day; it is typically less than 6 per cent of a council's rate revenue and about 0.2 of one per cent of state government outlays.[68]

4.83   Despite some excellent one-off initiatives, state government support for public libraries has been trending downwards. As Councillor Carland, Chairperson of the Shorelink Library Network in New South Wales, expressed it, 'state government funding has been going backwards ... it has been falling at a fairly steady clip of about one per cent a year for the last decade – down from about 20 per cent to about nine per cent in New South Wales, and New South Wales has historically been on the low side of the national scale'. He indicated that by comparison with Victoria, where state funding has slipped from one-half to a quarter, New South Wales was down from 20 per cent to nine per cent.[69]

4.84   A representative of the Municipal Association of Victoria, Mr Edwards, confirmed that in that state, they had moved from a period in the mid-1970s of almost 50:50 library funding from state and local government, to the present position of 25:75. He stressed that local government appreciated that 'the bucket of public funds is a finite size' but pointed out the competing priorities faced and the enormous challenges of meeting recurrent costs.[70]

4.85   The State Librarian of South Australia, Ms Halliday, claimed that the South Australian library funding arrangement was the envy of other states. A five-year memorandum of agreement exists between the Library Board of South Australia and local government over funding, which is set in advance and is linked to the CPI and

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67   *Submission 3,* p. 5.

68   Alan Bundy, 'Changing lives, making the difference: the 21st century public library', *APLIS,* 16(1) March 2003, p. 39.

69   *Evidence,* p. 128.

70   *Evidence,* pp. 21-22.

which therefore provided certainty for the libraries concerned.[71] She indicated, however, that over the last ten years, the trend observed in other states of a decreasing state government contribution vis-a-vis that of local government also pertained in her state, particularly because of the requirement for local government to pick up the IT hardware costs.[72]

4.86 Comparisons among the states can be misleading, however, because of the differing library models concerned. It is primarily because of these differing state arrangements for library services that library funding has not been a 'lead item' for the Australian Local Government Association in the past.[73]

4.87 State governments have been supportive of online initiatives. The Committee was told that of the $13.95 million state government funding for public libraries announced in New South Wales in 2002, some $8 million was for NSW.net.[74]

4.88 The old notion of state government funding on a strict per capita basis to provide public library services for residents of eligible local authorities exclusively has long since been abandoned, if not under the strict letter of the law. In New South Wales, part of the motivation for the current review of the NSW Library Act was the question of whether the current funding formula of per capita payment, base grant and loadings for isolation, population distribution and demographic composition could or should be prescribed in the legislation.

4.89 Additional complicating factors are the desirability of reciprocal access and borrowing rights, given that many people work or study and reside in different local government areas. The Committee notes that only some 75 per cent of NSW local authorities are party to the reciprocal membership agreement.[75] The position becomes even more complex if one endeavours to obtain strict funding parity for the reciprocal borrowing rights that sometimes exist between public libraries and school, TAFE or university libraries.

4.90 The availability of information via library websites has itself caused a major questioning of the per capita funding principle. Unless the library site does authentication checks as to the identity of a would-be electronic user, it could well be providing services to residents of other countries, let alone other councils. A representative of the University of Queensland told the Committee that, while that university had 30,000 students, its website registered use by some 340,000 PCs in 2002. And as cooperative licence agreements to share resources increase, this will

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71   *Evidence,* p. 336.

72   *Evidence,* p. 338.

73   *Evidence,* p. 24.

74   *Evidence,* p. 130.

75   Library Council of New South Wales, *Public Library Services in New South Wales: networking the community in the 21st century: Review of the Library Act 1939,* Sydney, [2001].

increasingly blur distinctions amongst users. It seems to the Committee that a pragmatic approach is required here, with public libraries to provide services equally to all comers without question, unless and until it becomes obvious that particular users are abusing the system.

4.91   In the course of its inquiry, the Committee received a great deal of information on the increased costs associated with online provision in libraries. The general impression it received was that libraries have had to fund online access from within existing budgets and that they have had to divert money from other activities to do so. As Mr Strempel of CLASA remarked, 'It is about recasting an existing shrinking pie.'[76]

4.92   It should be self-evident that it costs more to run a library that supports online services. There are hardware, software and connectivity costs, content costs and staff time and training costs that are add-ons, not to any significant extent replacements for, previous expenditure. If pressed, libraries can contain costs but in ways which might prove ultimately unacceptable to the user public. They can, for example, stop purchasing print copies of journals, at the risk of alienating the public which might not be entitled to online access. They can place technical or other caps on downloads, to contain costs. They can provide slow (and cheaper) download speeds, to discourage overuse. In the longer term, all of these, and similar, measures would probably be counter-productive.

4.93   A considerable funding challenge in the online environment in the public library context is the physical infrastructure. Library buildings dating from the 1950s and 60s may not lend themselves readily to housing or connecting computers, nor to providing private areas around terminals, computer training rooms, et cetera. The Committee was heartened to see or hear of the many new library buildings recently opened or in planning or under construction. The fact remains, however, that many are not up to standard.[77] And after carving out space for PCs, many share the problem of the Deniliquin Library which was described as 'bursting at the seams'.[78]

4.94   This problem has not gone unrecognised. The South Australian Government has provided some $94 million towards library capital works in that state since 2000, and the other states have also supported library infrastructure.

4.95   It is hard, if not impossible, to put a price tag on the cost to government of an ill-informed society. In the view of the Committee, given that government information is increasingly being disseminated online, it is incumbent upon governments at all levels to do all in their power to facilitate access to that information. If, in the process, they facilitate access to other information, encourage lifelong learning, support community cohesion and so forth, so much the better.

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76   *Evidence,* p. 363.

77   See, for example, *Evidence,* p. 349.

78   *Evidence,* p. 203.

4.96   Given the funding crisis many public libraries are facing, some witnesses to the Committee's inquiry questioned whether libraries should get more seriously into fund-raising. Elizabeth Swan of Information Edge thought so, suggesting that they could charge for hosting local business portals, venue hire, and that they could develop partnerships or seek sponsorships from local industries.[79] The Committee does not discount these ideas for the libraries for which they might be appropriate. It suspects, however, that the libraries whose need is greatest are probably those least capable of raising funds.

4.97   Funding has been more readily available at all levels of government for special projects. In Queensland, for example, the Committee was told that the state government had made 'a considerable amount of money' available to develop indigenous knowledge centres and indigenous library services.[80] But as the State Librarian, Ms Giles-Peters, stressed to the Committee, the key issue was sustainability:

> It would be ideal to be able to plan these things up front and say, 'Let's look at the longer term and certainly the sustainability of these projects.' I think we are all aware of projects that have very short life spans. Things happen and then they die, and the communities actually get quite fatigued: 'Here comes another project where you've got the equipment but we do not have the money to employ people. The equipment breaks down; we do not have the expertise in the community to actually fix it.'[81]

4.98   The call for awareness of the need to plan for sustainability was echoed throughout the Committee's public hearings program. Again and again, the Committee was told that hardware had arrived courtesy of grant initiatives, without obvious thought being given to how the recurrent issues of maintenance, upgrading, connectivity charges and training were to be handled.[82]

4.99   Another point that was raised with the Committee was that, as Councillor Carland of the Shorelink Library Network indicated, governments were expecting more of libraries these days. As he saw it, both state and federal governments were putting more of their client activity online, but that the consequent demand on library services was not being explicitly recognised in increased funding. Local councils, he maintained, 'have been fairly stoic over the last decade in picking up the slack' but that was unsustainable in the longer term.[83]

4.100   Rather than look at ways of boosting overall funding levels, there has been a tendency to look at ways to reduce costs. While the Committee has not made a

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79   *Evidence,* pp. 418-19.

80   *Evidence,* p. 317.

81   *Evidence,* p. 318.

82   See, for example, *Evidence,* p. 432.

83   *Evidence,* pp. 137-38.

detailed study of the economics of library service provision, it suspects that one obvious first step is to consider the small size of some local government councils and to encourage greater cooperation amongst them. The Committee was impressed with the regional library services covering several councils in some states, notably Victoria.

4.101   With the growing demand for broadband access, it has been recognised that there are many opportunities for improving the synergies between public libraries and other services, such as health and education.

4.102   As the Committee has discussed, part of the solution for the ongoing handling of telecommunications charges is to aggregate demand, then approach the networks for a discount. Representatives of the newly formed Public Libraries Australia association stressed the enormous opportunities presented by aggregating the purchasing power of some 1,700 libraries but also pointed out that in order to achieve that level of aggregation, some $1 million over five years would be required to set up the necessary network.[84]

4.103   While the Committee can see the logic of this approach and does not doubt the energy and commitment of its proponents, it suspects the territorial imperatives of the divided funding structure of public libraries will ultimately defeat such a proposal. It sees more merit in aggregating demand across services at the regional or state level, and ironing out any discrepancies in service provision to less affluent communities through the mechanism of the state libraries. If demand aggregation, for broadband or content, is seen to be the way forward, the Committee believes the responsibility must lie with an expanded role for the National Library which, through CASL, can most readily affect change, if funded to do so.

4.104   The Committee concludes that local government is now carrying a disproportionate share of public library funding, compared with the more equitable situation of the 1970s, when state governments contributed up to 50 per cent in some cases. It is incumbent on state governments to recognise the important role public libraries play in providing equitable access to online information by ensuring that they receive adequate support. Where there is shared responsibility for public library funding between state and local government, the Committee recommends that the states significantly increase their share of public library funding, moving towards matching local government levels of contribution.

Information literacy

4.105   One message which resounded throughout the Committee's inquiry was that online connectivity and content provision alone were not the ultimate answer to society's needs. An ability to identify, locate, evaluate and use information effectively was also vital. This is where libraries have a highly significant role to play. It has been regularly shown that information seekers regularly take the line of least effort. In the case of Internet searches, the majority of users never go past the first ten 'hits',

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84   *Evidence,* p. 433.

regardless of their quality. And information which can be provided immediately to the desktop is preferred over 'better' information which takes longer to provide.

4.106   In October 2001, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) adopted a policy statement on information for all Australians, which includes the following:

> Information literacy is a prerequisite for: participative citizenship; social inclusion; the creation of new knowledge; personal, vocational, corporate and organisational empowerment; and learning for life.[85]

4.107   As ALIA recognises, the achievement of information literacy for all Australians clearly requires the input of more agencies than libraries. Libraries are highly significant players, however, as they are one of the very few relevant organisations to which a majority of the population belongs. They already make a highly valuable contribution, unobtrusively, to an information-literate Australia but must be able to maintain and improve their services, particularly with regard to training and outreach activities, to continue their good work.

Staff training

4.108   If libraries are going to remain relevant in the 21st century, one imperative is well-trained staff. Numerous studies have shown that the calibre of the staff has always been a significant factor in library usage. The Committee was informed that the average age of professional librarians is in the mid-forties, so apart from ongoing professional training to maintain relevance in the online age, the profession at large needs to consider succession planning, the quantum of staff required and the appropriate training for the added challenges of the online library.

4.109   In the course of its inquiry, the Committee detected an element of concern being expressed about the present undergraduate and postgraduate library courses. It was felt that library schools were moving towards information management training more generally and the library component was shrinking, with little specific training for people in a public library environment.[86]

4.110   Dr Bundy was particularly concerned for the future of the joint school-community libraries in South Australia, as the majority of teacher librarians now running them were expected to retire in the not-too-distant future and, without trained replacements coming through, he feared that the education department would have no alternative but to employ unqualified people.[87]   He also lamented the phasing out in South Australia of the general undergraduate library degree, which he argued was preferred as a qualification by public library employers for its practical exposure to

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85   *Submission 93,* p. 6.

86   *Evidence,* p. 62.

87   *Evidence,* p. 360.

library issues, rather than the one-year postgraduate diploma. He asserted that there was sufficient student demand to justify retaining the course, but the University of Adelaide decided it had other priorities.[88]

4.111 Concern was also expressed at the drop-off in numbers of students undertaking postgraduate diplomas, following the introduction of full fees for those courses. Higher education statistics appear to lend support to these concerns, showing a drop from 331 students enrolled in 'library/archival studies – other postgraduate' in 1998 to 226 in 'librarianship, information management and curatorial studies – other postgraduate' in 2002.[89] The number of students enrolled in bachelor level library courses has also shown a steady decline in recent years.

4.112 Continuing professional education and staff training more generally are vital for an ageing workforce, and particularly given the new demands of the workplace. The Committee was encouraged to learn that even relatively small library systems saw staff training as a priority issue. Ms Holschier, the Central Murray Regional Library representative, told the Committee:

> I have insisted that our staff be really well trained – otherwise, it becomes too stressful for everybody – so they have done 'train the trainer' courses. Even though they know how to use the Internet, it is not the same thing as being able to help somebody else learn to do something. So we have invested in quality training, and I think it has paid off for our customers as well as our staff.[90]

4.113 State libraries have been remarkably supportive of their public library networks in terms of training. In Queensland, the Committee was told that it had been a priority area in the last two years[91] and many Queensland rural libraries expressed their gratitude for the help received.

4.114 The Director-General of the National Library of Australia, Ms Fullerton, stressed the need for more access to IT resources for librarians, so that they could keep their skills levels up and be in a better position to communicate with, and develop skill in, the user community:

> If [librarians] themselves have very limited access to online resources and online information, they cannot possibly hope to have a high level of competency themselves, and they need to have it.[92]

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88   *Evidence,* p. 357.

89   *Selected Higher Education Student Statistics, 1998 and 2002.*

90   *Evidence,* p. 208.

91   *Evidence,* p. 313.

92   *Evidence,* p. 93.

4.115   Other witnesses made the point that, especially in rural and regional areas, there was little opportunity for staff to access the continuing education needed to cope with 'gateway to resources' role, rather than simply the building of collections.[93]

4.116   It appears also that there is very unequal provision of continuing education across the profession. Mr Strempel, representing the Council of Library Administrators of South Australia, outlined the in-house practical training courses on writing web pages, manipulating the insides of PCs and hands-on searching of databases provided within his large council area.[94] This seems to be the exception rather than the rule, however.

4.117   Many witnesses pointed to the difficulty for library staff in one- or two-person country libraries to be released to access training in the city.[95] Technology has provided a way to overcome this problem in relation to ICT. The Committee was told of an online tutorial available for purchase from Monash University. The tutorial contains about 30 modules which users work through at their own pace, then do a test to qualify them for an Australian Computer Driving Licence. An international version also exists. Ms Mackenzie, representing ALIA, indicated that ALIA was purchasing it for members, as it sees that as part of its role in their continuing professional development.[96]

4.118   In academic libraries, however, a more extreme situation prevailed. Because of the nature of the work, and the earlier take-up of IT, librarians have been obliged to develop not only personal online skills but also high-level information literacy teaching skills. Mrs McCarthy of the Queensland University of Technology indicated that many of her professional staff were undertaking postgraduate courses in higher education to equip them for their role as educators.[97]

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93   *Evidence,* p. 172.

94   *Evidence,* p. 370.

95   See, for example, *Evidence,* p. 173; p. 370.

96   *Evidence,* p. 82.

97   *Evidence,* p. 306.