

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning**

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**Received:** 17/06/2004

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President

**Organisation:** The Lifelong Learning Council of Queensland Inc

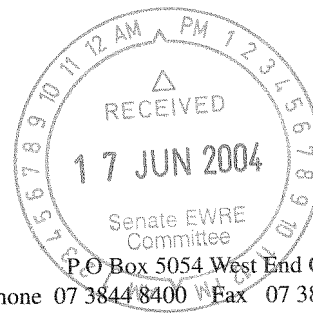
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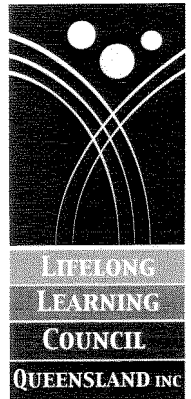
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The Secretary  
Senate Employment, Workplace relations and  
Education References Committee  
Suite SG.52, Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Enclosed please find a submission to the Senate Enquiry into Lifelong Learning from the Lifelong Learning Council of Qld Inc., submitted by the Council after a consultative process with some of our networked organisations in adult and community education.

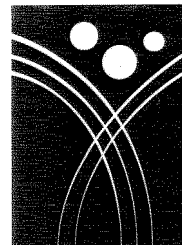
The submission is by necessity reasonably brief and contains only the gist of the Council's and other collaborators views about the developments and likely progress of adult education, community education and life-long learning in Australia and particularly in Queensland in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Office bearers of the Council would greatly welcome any opportunity to present in person at the Senate hearings and develop the council's full position in relation to this vital topic.

Yours sincerely

Marya McDonald  
President  
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16/6/2004



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Submission

To



Senate Employment Workplace Relations and Education  
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Inquiry into the progress and future direction of lifelong learning

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## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- A. Policies and strategies aimed at addressing the life-long learning needs of an ageing population**
- B. The ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning since 1997**
- C. The adequacy of any structural and policy changes at Commonwealth and State or Territory level which have been made in response to these technological developments**
- D. Technological barriers to participation in life-long learning and adult and community education, and the ways in which these might be overcome**
- E. The extent to which training, professional development and role of adult educators has kept pace with or been influenced by technological and on-line developments since 1997**
- F. Re-training strategies as an element in life-long learning, especially for those living in rural and regional areas.**

## **PREAMBLE**

This paper has been written so that adult and community educators, teachers, trainers, coordinators, managers and anyone interested in understanding and promoting the field of A&CE can do so from a common platform of understanding and agreement and can share this with others. This is the Council's primary intention in making its contribution to the Senate Enquiry.

## **Introduction**

The Lifelong Learning Council of QLD Inc (LLCQ) is a non-profit, peak body in adult and community education (A&CE) in Queensland. We are using various strategies to communicate with and represent adult educators and providers, mainly in the community sector.

Historically LLCQ has established itself in this role due to of a lack of infrastructure to support post-compulsory informal learning for adults in Queensland. There is no Minister stated responsibility for A&CE in the Queensland government, nor is there legislation inclusive of A&CE in its broader context\*. This is completely unlike the other three sectors of education namely, compulsory schooling (primary and secondary), vocational education and training (VET) (accredited training offered by TAFE and through Registered Training Organisations) and higher or tertiary education. All of these areas are covered by Ministerial portfolios with clearly stated legislative provisions. We in Queensland seek to make a contribution to Enquiry from the unique perspective of Queensland because ACE in community learning has little other formal voice than the Council representing the views of its network.

Although the Council is aware of and concerned with all the aspects of lifelong learning its universal scope, colloquially described as “cradle to grave” learning, we have chosen to maintain a particular and special focus on adult and community learning as the less represented and lobbied for sub sections of the lifelong learning movement as this reflects our historic development as well as our interest.

(\* There are two reference in two Queensland Acts of Parliament, these refer to TAFE Institutes only.)

## **DESCRIPTION OF ACE**

- A&CE is diverse with many and varied activities and providers. Many in the field may not see their efforts as “education” or “learning”. The focus of their activity is often on localized development and service delivery. Nonetheless, these organisations and educators frequently share a set of values and a philosophy concerning proactive individual empowerment, community development and promotion of community vision through enhanced learning opportunities.
- Often, but not exclusively, A&CE is located in the non-profit community sector. Community-based A&CE plays a role in augmenting and value-adding to the community’s asset base which remains exclusively within the community’s control. That is, the “profit” from A&CE is increased social capital, rather than individual wealth creation.
- Many A&CE organisations recognize and share in common the vital developmental role of community cohesion and inclusion; pre-vocational social and learning opportunities; local resilience to changing labour market circumstances; emerging technologies; the digital divide; and all the challenges these circumstances and others offer to local groups and their community’s greater well-being.
- A&CE offers a spectrum of learning outcomes from individual opportunities for skills and empowerment to widespread community programs which incorporate community development strategies like networking, partnerships and group

linkages. These developmental strategies build up and upon learning opportunities for adults to meet local learning needs.

- Learning, mentoring, training and instruction in A&CE is offered on a continuum from gifted amateur tutors, mentors and community brokers to qualified adult educators. Instructional programs also range from mentored or nurtured activities (one-to-one and small group) to formal education and training.
- While the formal training sectors (where delivery is mostly through institutions) concentrate on education and training for identifiable economic sectors and industries, A&CE has the potential for greater innovation, and the possibility to support new and emerging fields and industries. Past examples that have now become more formalised or commercialised include alternative energy, permaculture, stock market education, boating and navigation, IT based programs, alternative health and community services. On the other hand, industries decline at times and the once commercial activities can become cottage industries that are supported through community education, for example, candle making.
- Above all, ACE is identified with good practice in adult teaching and learning, to meet community needs, designing learning opportunities around life events rather than standardized curriculum with outcomes solely related to employment.

### **Who is involved with A&CE?**

In providing this information as a preamble to the terms of reference for the Enquiry, the Council seeks to make clear the very great but under valued and under resourced potential of ACE in terms of community provision in Queensland. It will be obvious that this potential is not linked exclusively to the IT technologies but that specific potential is always available if only the resources were likewise available. However the Council's struggle is to have the entire fourth sector comparatively resourced and valued as are the other three established institutional sectors before a focus on cutting edge IT or communication policies, programs, resources and practices can become the major aspect of service delivery

The following list is neither exhaustive nor prioritised:

- Universities of the Third Age or Senior Citizens Clubs eg computer groups/chat rooms
- Community/Neighbourhood Houses/Centres/Multicultural Resource Centres
- Special interest community groups established for social and community issues, cultural, religious or language groups, arts, craft and hobby activities, environmental education, leisure and recreation activities for adults, and general education groups.
- Literacy providers
- School based P&C Associations- Leisure, Learning and Parenting programs
- Short course providers, for example, A&CE in TAFE
- University extension programs
- Distance learning providers
- Employment training providers
- Professional associations, particularly offering continuing education
- Trade Unions
- Community workplace training providers eg, Volunteering Qld, Queensland Council of Social Service

- Community Services, such as Disability, Aged Care, Housing Co-op, Youth, etc. providers
- Churches and other spiritual groups
- Local government
- Public and community halls which offer venues for adult and community education.

In summary then, the Council sees ACE in Queensland as a contributor to community capacity building through

- responding to developing community opportunities
- assisting communities become and remain resilient in the face of low and limited employment through involvement in non paying community work which is an invaluable contribution to the local economy
- generating a lifelong learning community culture as a basis of inclusive participation in community life
- offering courses and programs to meet individual needs, including wherever possible cutting edge IT and communications strategies and programs to assist in all the above objectives.

The provision of A&CE is an important contribution to the Queensland economy through offering learning chances:

- to early school leavers and those who have had a negative experience with formal educational institutions
- that allow flexibility for people to capitalize on job chances as they occur
- that promote flexibility in and out of casualised and contract employment through rapidly acquiring new and timely skills in short courses
- that support new and emerging industries before they are recognised and formalised by social institutions, especially industries and activities which are based on emerging IT and communications innovations
- that are better able to take individuals learning and training styles into account.

Furthermore, A&CE has important individual and social outcomes including:

- improvement in health, well being, self-esteem and quality of life
- making pathways into confidence, self employment and entrepreneurialism
- developing critical faculties as a good and thinking citizen in a democracy
- helping people out of a pattern of thinking around long term welfare dependency.

## **Policies and strategies aimed at addressing the life-long learning needs of an ageing population.**

Like many of the other developed nations, Australia has a rapidly expanding aged population which will live ever longer in better health (in general) and with needs for community involvement and lifelong learning ambitions far beyond any previous expectation. This is borne out by evidence submitted to other enquiries on the ageing population of Australia and on mature aged workers which see the uptake of computerised, net based and web based activities as being at an all time and growing high among our senior citizens.

However, it would be a gross oversimplification of the analysis of this trend to see it as a universal phenomenon. The digital divide is real and pervasive and, in addition, there is genuine resistance in several sectors of the aged population to aspects of technological progress.

Factors like the level of general education and access to the hardware and technologies, which will determine the rate of uptake of these technologically based ways of accessing lifelong learning, are still major factors in the aged population. These are even further exacerbated as is seen in the general population, by complex and complicating factors such as geographical and personal isolation, physical frailty and mental health issues which influence ability to access expensive IT resources in a pooled location rather than in private homes. Availability of back up and learning support personnel, hard ware modifications which better suit the language of a generation unfamiliar and uncomfortable with "e-speak", resistance to on-line communication of certain types of information and materials, and economic and social status enabling the purchase of what the youthful public regard as "basic" IT technologies. This equipment may still represent major capital purchases, even extravagances, within the households of the elderly.

The whole question of the uptake of technologies to facilitate lifelong learning among the ageing population requires a raft of flexible strategies, some of which need to be sensitive to difference in the levels of basic adult education levels which enable what are still essentially text based coding and decoding practices. Without a generally high level of basic adult education in the general community, there can be little realistic expectation that the uptake of computer based learning technology beyond the literate and wealthier sector of the aged population will occur. Since Australia has a functional illiteracy rate of 12% of the adult population aged 45+ according to the 1997 ILS survey, there is still a very long way to go to assist the adults of Australia with basic adult education programs. Nowhere is this truer than in Queensland which has no formal adult education sector in A&CE at all, relying instead on small parcels of ad hoc funding distributed in a highly competitive manner to groups in the community.

These basic adult literacy and numeracy and general knowledge requirements are made even more difficult for the elderly by an overlay of purely mechanical and protocol based IT requirements for access in a language which is intensely unfamiliar and often off putting. For a person of limited skills, there is real resistance to a new language of learning which requires more than they are reasonably familiar with from their life experience. For several sectors in the aged community, like elderly women



who have never worked or elderly men who have only ever had basic 'blue collar' jobs, the impact of the answering machine, the Customer Service Centre phone queue and the ATM are still unwelcome challenges and about all that they can accommodate in their experience of technology. This has implications for the designers of hardware itself to be user friendly to the elderly and to learning program designers so that language reflects life experience and is an incentive to further lifelong learning. All of this may well lead back to intervention and subsidy by governments to ensure that programs are set up to achieve outcomes and uptake among the elderly.

Not all the elderly are sufficiently wealthy that they can readily afford the hardware and training which enables them to seek out IT technology as an attractive means of continuing their IT based lifelong learning. There needs to be some thought given to subsidy for the elderly as individuals who cannot afford these technologies, even should they wish to do so. There also needs to be even more appreciation that many elderly people would see their lifelong learning as something which might more appropriately be undertaken as "just enough, just in time" learning, with a sprinkling of IT based information. This would still essentially be in the learning modes with which they are familiar and comfortable eg, discussion groups, as a lead into email based communication, rather than computer chat room activities as a first line activity.

### **The ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning since 1997.**

The LLCQ encounters service delivery of adult and lifelong learning in the community as part of its daily role and uses Internet based technological developments extensively in its own business operations. However, we are of a view that to see the activity described as a universal strategy for all sectors of the community is a gross simplification of the importance of these technologies in large portions of the adult communities' learning activities. Our experience is that there can be no doubt that all persons engaged in any type of clerical or managerial or administrative work now regularly confronts these activities in their work life and have little resistance to using the range of web and Internet based technologies available to them in their private and community lives as well. But the crucial factor involved in the activities of these "Net Surfers" is that, first and foremost, they can afford the surfboard and have a mindset of usage arising out of familiar experience.

It is still overwhelmingly true, in our experience, that a digital divide persists where many households in Australia are NOT connected to the web since their children access these services via their schools or libraries and many of the disadvantaged individuals in Australia would no more access these technologies than they would any other sophisticated and expensive piece of equipment. The touch screen in Centrelink would be a common encounter with this type of technology, but not necessarily beyond that.

Additionally, individuals use any type of technology if they see it, not only as affordable, but also as having some real application and purpose in their lives. Whilst the films of popular culture would have us believe that all young persons are incipient

and often inveterate trawlers of the Internet for chat, information and entertainment, this is not true in our experience for this age group in particular, but also more generally for large sections of the community who are best described as socially and economically disadvantaged. If you are having difficulty with basic living expenses, you are generally unlikely to have the hardware to enable you to search the Net. If you have low skills in addition, you are generally unlikely to see Net searching as applicable to your life chances.

Despite all the above, there has been a thrust in recent years for several of the formal educational institutions primarily TAFE's and others to see "e-learning" as an attractive methodology for mass public education and they would probably describe it as an easily accessible and attractively self-paced method of adult and lifelong learning. This is certainly true for that limited sector of the adult learning community whose learning style is commensurate with the technological approach which this type of on-line learning uses. However, as with any formal learning which is predicated on outcomes linked to productivity, staff budgetary concerns and cheapness of mass delivery, there are some intrinsic problems with "E-learning" as a total concept.

What is most significantly lacking from the delivery of "E-Learning", as Colin Lankshear would describe it, is **Organic contexts of practice**. This means authentic purposes, access to genuine expertise, the opportunity to practice in role with exposure to human and non human scaffolds and props. He sees a serious lack of

- **Opportunity to see and understand parts in relation to wholes: how the different components--skills, beliefs, values, procedures, goals, concepts, purposes, actions, interactions, relationships, artifacts, etc--fit together to make up a coherent, embodied, meaningful social practice.**

Face-to-face learning activities in classrooms make skillful use of peers and scaffolds, involve learners in creating and maintaining embodied communities of practice with their cultural goals, rhythms and procedures, and give learners unmediated access to pockets of genuine experience: e.g., where a teacher is also an experienced actor or writes a newspaper column, or where peers are native speakers of foreign languages or skilled computer programmers.

But e-learners, locked in front of a screen, are even further removed from the flesh and blood social practices of everyday life than they are within classrooms. Practicing in role is reduced to scrolling and button pressing--a one-dimensional apprenticeship if there ever was one. They envisage >13,670 hours of clicking our way around mandated standardized online curriculum packages without the moment by moment experience of making meaning out of the content in the face-to-face presence of others like ourselves. Even confusion is meaningful when it is co-produced and shared with others. But confusion in isolation is hell on wheels. (Kurzweil 1999) states:

"My access to expertise is as detached and fragile as my hardware and software. What happens when it fails and I can't afford to fix it? Who cares if I can't access what I need right now? I am likely to learn, implicitly but insidiously, in byte-sized chunks, that everything is ultimately simply information. Code. And that anyone who can program has the right to create. To clone. To patent. In the end I can embrace the post-human ranks of those who want to download their minds, link them to computers, abandon the body, and 'live for 10,000 years'

**The adequacy of any structural and policy changes at Commonwealth and State or Territory level which have been made in response to these technological developments.**

Before responding to the nature of any direct correlation between Government policy in education and technological developments, let us say a few words about the general impact of State and Federal policies upon the adult education sector. Over the last two decades, federal and state government policies have focused on the marketisation of a wide range of services. That is to say, policies concerning wage setting, taxation, social security, child support, health and other service delivery have been increasingly shifted from the public to the private realm with market forces determining services levels and prices. By and large, these policies impact upon education and training availability by increasing the direct cost to consumers while reducing in the number and availability of services in many areas, especially rural and regional Australia.

Liberal/National Coalition education policy at a Federal level largely ignores the learning needs of a significant proportion of Australian society, ie: people other than young people, school leavers, University entrants or people seeking entry or re-entry to the workforce. What is missing is recognition of the needs of middle-aged adult Australians who must learn for a lifetime in order to accommodate changes driven by technology, globalisation and international competitiveness in workplaces, society and community.

As far as the Queensland government is concerned, policies that relate to the so-called "Smart State" raft of initiatives are limited to formal education and training provision and to those already actively engaged in the world of work. There are limited policies and programs to help long-term unemployed re-enter the workforce, but these are focused on formal training provision and are often unattractive to people who have previous negative learning experiences.

The lesson for policy makers, educators and marketers of innovative conceptual thinking is that once primary information systems are established, particularly in individuals with a low level of skill in information retrieval and analysis, unless you offer a "second chance" approach to adult learning for those who seek to widen these skills, world views as well as self esteem and competency become set very early in family life. A further complication is that to low skilled clients, simple and often conservative options seem both easy and feasible as these individuals do not have the developed critical discourse analysis skills or the types of 'institutional' literacy skills to fully understand or interrogate complex data. This perpetuates conservative, limited thinking and the inability to absorb or be amenable to technological developments as they occur and builds resistance to acquisition of new technologies, even when they become more affordable. None are seen as relevant or attractive enough as an investment in learning.

Broad social policy in relation to crucial matters like the general level of income distribution in the wider community, taxation "reform" favouring middle and higher income earning Australians affects other policy imperatives. Education policy, focused firmly on formal institutional providers and ignoring of the role of the ACE sector, further exacerbates disaffection, relative economic poverty, social disadvantage and exclusion from full participation in citizenship privileges, all of which have the potential of negatively affecting family, social and political behaviours. The outcomes for technological innovation and the uptake of such innovation in the wider community are less easy to quantify and identify, but any legislation or policy around technological change is compromised by less than equitable social policy.

### **Technological barriers to participation in life-long learning and adult and community education, and the ways in which these might be overcome.**

Much has already been mentioned in this submission about mistaken oversimplification in merely seeing the solution to barriers to lifelong learning as being solely, or even principally, invested in the realm of technology. As has already been stated, the elderly, the poor, the indigent, the unemployed, the 'battlers' or the working poor, the indigenous or recent arrived migrants, the illiterate or innumerate may not even know about the value of any type of technology to their lifelong learning because in general they have more pressing claims upon their resources and attention. Statistically these groups compromise a large proportion of the Australian community. It would appear likely that technological barriers would be substantially reduced by addressing social policy issues outlined earlier.

Having said that, there are various categories of technological barriers which are financial (cost of hardware software, connection and on going charges), user friendliness (especially for the aged or those with any kind of disability including the 'disability' of ESL or LOTE background, ease of operation, meshing systems and ease of transfer between programs, support and back up services, education and training in system operations), mechanical or systemic (like compatibility of software and systems, technology "reaching" rural or remote locations).

There are also cultural and psychological aspects to the applications of these technologies which need to be taken into account as barriers to usage and uptake, for example:

- that children are more proficient users than heads of ethnic or disadvantaged households,
- the perception that anything new or associated with technology is automatically too hard for certain groups, or
- that previous negative experiences of schooling do predispose adults into a mind set which is unresponsive or resistant to the notion that learning should be engaged with over an entire lifetime.

**The extent to which training, professional development and role of adult educators has kept pace with or been influenced by technological and on-line developments since 1997.**

The Council is one of the only bodies in Queensland providing any kind of professional development for adult and community educators. Certainly, if we are any sort of yardstick, our priority is on the more basic survival processes of accessing ever scarcer funding and resources. These priorities leave little time to focus on professional development to keep pace with technological advances in learning strategies and methodologies. In the field, adult educators learn this on the job, at their own cost, in their own time or they don't learn at all! The best of them would undoubtedly see this activity as part of their own goals as lifelong learners, but such learning is in very short supply and is not supported by the State outside formal institutions such as TAFE.

The first reason for this is the deliberate marginalization the ACE sector by successive Queensland Governments and the failure to recognize ACE as a sector on parity with the other three sectors of learning. It is very much a case of what is not recognised is not value and what is not valued is not supported. There is a second significant reason to do with the stranglehold of the VET agenda in response Federal and State government reforms geared exclusively to economic, industry-driven goals. The political thrust of governments over two decades now has been towards national productivity and competitiveness. This has been coupled with an inordinate desire to cut the cost of the welfare budget by initiatives to get people into work through vocational education and training. The result is an economic rationalist focus on educational programs (including professional development programs for educators themselves) with outcomes based on massification of program delivery, shorter time for teaching and learning, fewer human resources, rigid competency based assessment and QA systems and cumbersome industry consultative structures.

Although the rhetoric of "lifelong learning" has permeated the political discourse of all major political parties and is used today in many State and Federal Departments, it remains unclear whether bureaucrats leading these discussions fully understand the complex nature of the beast. In our discussions with Departmental officers their notion of "lifelong learning" tends to reflect a perception which is twofold:

- firstly, that the post-school education sector, either in the form of universities or the TAFE sector for VET, is the sole repository of all adult education, and
- secondly, that lifelong learning is only about workplace change and labour market changeability, hence the need for constant skills upgrading.

In some contexts it appears that bureaucrats focus exclusively on one group of adult learners and hold a germinal belief that all issues to do with post compulsory education and training emanate from young people or the long-term unemployed. Furthermore that all adults in post compulsory education and training are "young people" or at best, people actively seeking work or retraining to return to work!

Such is of course not the case, even in the TAFE/VET sectors where, statistically, there are many mature-aged learners. However, this common misperception shows a certain blind spot about the provision of adult education opportunities both in and by the community because of an assumption (which incidentally is common to all political parties) that these opportunities are only to be found in the TAFE/VET or higher education sectors and absolutely must attach to employment outcomes.



This has enormous implications for the type and availability of professional development opportunities for adult educators. Put briefly, if you are an adult educator within TAFE or VET sectors, then there is some limited PD for you because you are in the business of getting people into jobs. But if you work the community with the mixed objectives of proactive community development, basic adult education, personal empowerment to adult clients, or even community resilience in the face of widespread job losses, then any professional development you do is up to you to find, fund or create for yourself.

### **Re-training strategies as an element in life-long learning, especially for those living in rural and regional areas.**

Please note the comments in the paragraph above: we have already indicated that politicians, policy makers and administrators of programs in lifelong learning genuinely believe that lifelong learning is really all about workplace change and labour market changeability, hence the need for constant skills upgrading. This is true as it stands, but retraining as a strategy is so often limited to applying solely to people actively seeking work or retraining to return to work.

Paid employment is hugely important in our industrialized and technologically based society and the mantra of full employment, existing long after it is a realistic goal in a society that has such rapid change in the nature of work, still has a very persuasive pull with all the major political parties. But how real is this in terms of the technological progress of the nation and other major philosophical and political debates about balancing work and family life, better parenting from a nation apparently short on male role models and so on? Do we really want these "limited" number of men to be at the exclusive behest of their role as workers? Are those disabled persons in our midst not to be seen as contributors to society unless they are workers in paid employment as well? What of the significant contribution made by volunteers to Australia's economy? What happens to communities where industries wither and jobs are lost? Are they lost too or should they focus on other community strategies like resilience to survive downturn and local crisis, or on an entrepreneurialism which takes advantage of the next niche opportunity when it arises or when they create it for themselves?

And who trains the trainers? If the pattern alluded in the previous item on professional development is true, there is precious little hope of training resources for you., Further, if you are located in the adult or community education sectors, then there is even less hope for you to access these opportunities if you are in a rural or remote location with all the physical barriers which distance and effort implies? Outside the major cities of Australia, the situation of people wishing to access any education and training is always made more difficult with the aggravated effect of distance and cost. This is even more the case if you are trying to access lifelong learning opportunities, even through conventional and traditionally well-funded outreach services of teaching and learning organisations. The problem is made so much more difficult if you are trying to access unfamiliar new technologies from within the adult education sector.