

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

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

Submission no: 28

Received: 18/06/2004

Submitter: Ms Sharon Connolly
Chief Executive Officer

Organisation: Film Australia Limited

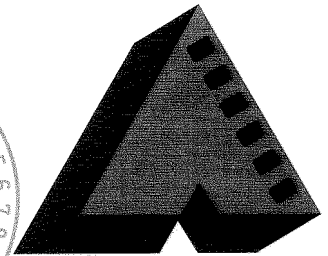
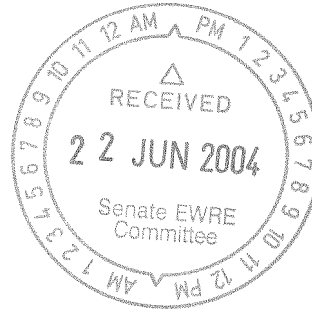
Address: 101 Eton Road
LINDFIELD NSW 2070

Phone: 02 9413 8619

Fax: 02 9413 3565

Email: jbowtell@filmaust.com.au

18 June 2004



FILM AUSTRALIA

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

Film Australia Limited
ABN 19 008 639 316
PO Box 46 Lindfield
101 Eton Road Lindfield
NSW 2070 Australia
www.filmaust.com.au
phone: 61 2 9413 8777
fax: 61 2 9416 5672

Dear Committee Secretary:

Please find attached a copy of Film Australia's submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Reference Committee Inquiry into the Progress and Future of Life-long Learning.

I will forward to the Committee some additional material on Film Australia this afternoon. However, if the Committee would like any further information on Film Australia or the Education Production Initiative or to discuss the recommendations included in our submission, we would be very happy to provide.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith Bowtell".

Judith Bowtell
Executive Officer



Progress and future direction of life-long learning inquiry

Film Australia

Film Australia is one of the nation's largest producers of television documentaries and educational programs. Though an integral part of the Australian Government's film program, Film Australia is neither a funding agency nor broadcaster.

It is an Australian Government-owned production and distribution company—an integrated business which performs a community service. Its mission is the creation of an audio-visual record of Australian life, through the commissioning, distribution and management of programs which deal with matters of national interest to Australia or illustrate and interpret aspects of Australian life.

Film Australia receives finance from the Australian Government under a contract requiring the company to devise, produce and distribute National Interest Program productions. It acts as the executive producer of such programs, drawing the creative and technical talent needed to produce them from Australia's independent documentary production industry.

Film Australia supports the Australian documentary sector not only by the commissioning of National Interest Program production, but through the provision of services and facilities.

It offers a world-wide distribution service for both National Interest Program and independently produced documentaries, marketing them to broadcasters in Australia and overseas and to schools, universities and community groups throughout Australia.

Film Australia's Library houses a unique collection of titles spanning over a century of Australia's history and licenses them, and the valuable archival materials they contain, to the production industry.

In 2003 the company established an educational production initiative with newly granted Government funding to make its extensive Library more available to audiences in the educational sector. Existing audio-visual materials are used to develop programs specifically designed for educational purposes and for delivery online, on DVD and on other platforms. The first slate of programs completed under the initiative is due for release in the second half of 2004. These programs will complement Film Australia's existing catalogue which contains thousands of titles with broader learning applications.

Background

“The ability to create, access and use knowledge is becoming a fundamental determinant of global competitiveness”, according to the World Bank. Carl Dahlman, one of its representatives at the recent World Education Market in Lisbon (May 2003) rejected those definitions of the “knowledge economy” which emphasise only information technology and high technology, citing the World Bank’s broader definition of the knowledge economy as:

“an economy that makes effective use of knowledge for its economic and social development.”

The World Bank identifies seven key elements of the “knowledge revolution.” Third on the list is the “increased importance of education and up-skilling of the labour force, and life-long learning.” Among six key trends in education and training it identifies the “increased prevalence of life-long learning.”

The European Commission responsible for Education and Culture agrees. In her address, a Commission member, Viviane Reading, said;

“In a knowledge society individuals must update and complement their knowledge, competencies and skills throughout life to maximise their personal development and improve their position in the labour market...An integrated approach to learning is needed, ending the rather artificial separation between education on the one hand and professional training on the other, and based on the principle of Life-long Learning. New technologies, when used effectively, can help us achieve this reform, by opening up access to educational resources, improving the flexibility and appropriateness of learning, and by facilitating new partnerships...”

In Australia the establishment of the Federal and States funded Learning Federation has certainly expanded support for creation of digital curriculum resources.

On a much smaller scale, Film Australia’s Educational Production Initiative will each year, with a combination of Federal funding of about \$450,000 annually and the resources of the company’s unique audio-visual archive, develop and produce programs designed to facilitate greater educational access to Commonwealth copyright materials managed by Film Australia.

However, both these initiatives are aimed at the formal educational sector. They focus on the production of resources aimed primarily at schools, though the Learning Federation’s approach is curriculum specific, whilst the Film Australia initiative aims to produce more broadly applicable materials for use in the educational sector by students and teachers at secondary and tertiary levels.

Figures provided by the US Department of Education show that the participation in adult learning in the USA grew rapidly between 1991 and 1999, with the greatest increase in participation occurring in the over 45 age group. Emerging trends in the US include the growth of an educational consumer market; a growth said to be constrained by a lack of supply rather than by any shortage of demand. The “working

adult" educational market is also growing as constant change and competition create needs for constant upgrading of skills and knowledge.

In the US and Canada 40% and 30% of undergraduates are over 25. In Australia, as in NZ, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, OECD figures show that more than 20% of first year university students were over 27 years of age in 2000.

Life-long Learning in all its forms is attracting new learners; older and part time students.

Yet Australia is rare in the Western world in having neither a dedicated educational television channel as part of an integrated learning network delivering complementary materials via a range of platforms, linking television with resources delivered on-line, print and via other media.

The ABC has axed its digital channels and withdrawn funding from schools programs. SBS has not yet determined precisely what it will do with its digital channels, though it may ultimately establish an educational channel. Foxtel raised the possibility of a knowledge channel during ACCC investigations into the potential impact of content sharing, however no such channel was ultimately offered among the numerous additional channels launched on the new Foxtel digital service.

If Australia is to offer its population access to life-long learning opportunities equivalent to those of other developed nations, the establishment of a learning channel is imperative. A learning channel, preferably offered free of charge, would seem a most effective and equitable way to provide nationwide access to life-long learning resources.

Furthermore, the establishment of such a channel could well prove critical in the economic, social and cultural development of rural and regional Australia, and for the nation as a whole, if World Bank representatives quoted above are correct in saying "the ability to create, access and use knowledge is becoming a fundamental determinant of global competitiveness."

Should a learning channel be established, issues of content and its relevance to Australian needs are critical. Similarly its effectiveness may well depend on the capacity to add value to audio-visual materials through the provision of complementary resources (at the most basic level, such materials as study guides, bibliographies, etc).

Whether a learning channel is established by the public or private sector, the reality is that it will require Government intervention if it is to screen adequate levels of Australian produced material. The lower cost of imported programs means that they are most attractive to television channels wishing to run cost effective operations, especially in their start up years. Without meaningful regulation for local content in either the pay TV or free to air sectors, or a plentiful, supply of appropriate low-cost Australian programs, there is unlikely to be a significant Australian contribution to the life-long learning opportunities of all Australians.

Film Australia is one of only two organisations which manage copyright in sizeable libraries of Australian produced material suitable for such a channel (the other being the ABC). Whilst there is a considerable amount of relevant material produced outside of these two organisations, it is largely unmanaged in the domestic market, with domestic free to air television rights being tied up by presale deals for 3-8 years from delivery, pay TV and internet rights often remaining unexploited and even unassigned.

Certainly there are very few, if any, attempts to package material for educational use, save for the production of text-based study guides which may encourage educational copying and use especially at the time of a program's first free to air TV screening. Yet in countries where there are learning channels of various kinds, they are invariably complemented by websites and other resources which add value to television programs and simultaneously encourage viewers to engage with the learning opportunities their programs provide.

Recommendations:

- Film Australia recommends that Government consider options for the creation and support of a "learning channel" with national reach and dedicated to provision of audio-visual materials to address the life-long learning needs of an ageing population.
- An existing and significant supply of transmission-ready programs should be supported by the creation of complementary on-line, print or DVD materials, to encourage and support the establishment of an Australian learning channel.
- Should a learning channel or channels be established, they will require an ongoing supply of **new** Australian learning materials aimed at life-long learners, home and working adult educational audiences. The existing educational and documentary audio-visual production sector has the proven ability to create such materials, but is greatly constrained by the present shortage of exhibition and distribution opportunities, and by relatively low levels of subsidy to the industry.

In addition to the creation of learning channel (regulated so as to provide appropriate levels of Australian-oriented and produced content to life-long learners), the establishment of an enterprise which would commission and finance the creation of Australian learning content is recommended. Given its expertise in production commissioning and in educational production and distribution, Film Australia has the experience and capacity to work collaboratively with private sector producers and exhibitors to ensure the creation of Australian life-long learning materials now and into the future.