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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Submitter: Ms Lea Giles-Peters
State Librarian

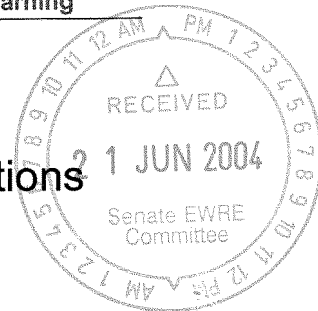**Organisation:**   State Library of Queensland

Address: PO Box 3488
SOUTH BRISBANE QLD 4101

Phone: 07 3840 7864

Fax: 07 3840 7860

Email: lea.giles-peters@slq.qld.gov.au

Senate inquiry into the progress and future directions of life-long learning

Submission from the State Library of Queensland

Foreword from the State Librarian

The issue of lifelong learning has always been one that is close to the aims and visions of libraries. The *Smart libraries build smart communities: future directions of the State Library of Queensland* policy *(Future Directions* policy)[1] includes lifelong learning as a key outcome. The State Library recognises that learning is now more generally recognised as a lifelong process that creates competence, confidence and skills that allow people to organise their lives, improve their quality of life and engage with society. Literacy and information literacy skills are central to the lifelong learning process. Public libraries throughout Queensland are actively and passionately encouraging their communities to see learning as lifelong, and playing an essential role in supporting that learning.

On behalf of the Library Board of Queensland, I applaud the interest of the Committee in investigating the changing nature and future of lifelong learning. The concept is broad, ideally a journey from cradle to grave, which takes in formal and non-formal experiences. But while learning happens in many contexts, almost without exception, it has ongoing social implications for individuals and communities.

I am pleased to be able to provide this submission from the State Library of Queensland and look forward to the results of the Committee's inquiry.

Lea Giles-Peters
State Librarian

State Library of Queensland
PO Box 3488
South Brisbane
Queensland 4101
p. 07 3840 7864
f. 07 3840 7860
e. lea.giles-peters@slq.qld.gov.au

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[1] http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/pub/policies/smart.htm cited 14 June 2004

a) policies and strategies aimed at addressing the lifelong learning needs of an ageing population

Identifying and addressing lifelong learning needs
As Australia's population is ageing, and maintaining healthy and active lifestyles, there are many people using libraries who have more leisure time and an interest in learning.

While the awareness of Australia's ageing population has an impact on the services delivered by the State Library, there are other demographic factors which suggest many groups in society for whom lifelong learning offers real benefit. People with disabilities, multicultural communities (particularly newer communities as distinct from well established ethno-cultural groups) and Indigenous Queenslanders are also a focus of programs and strategies delivered by the State Library. The activity of people engaging in lifelong learning is often a desire to pursue an interest in a subject, rather than an explicit desire "to learn". This interest may be what brings a client to the State Library to investigate their family history for example, but what happens quietly and simultaneously, is that people are learning.

As lifelong learning applies to the whole lifespan, children's experience of learning is also important. Research has demonstrated that early access to technology has advantages for children, as a study in the journal *Pediatrics* noted.

> Preschool children who use a computer appear to develop better learning skills than peers who lack computer savvy. In a study of 122 children aged 3 to 5, those exposed to a home or school computer either alone or with someone else three to four times a week scored higher on tests that gauge school readiness and cognitive development than non-users.[2]

The role of libraries in lifelong learning
Library staff, as facilitators of a process, show clients where and how to access information, developing their information literacy; and clients develop the skills to pursue their interests independently. They may have learnt skills to assist them with a piece of equipment, a program, a way of approaching their search, an arrangement of materials – the list is endless.

The State Library, and public libraries generally, foster self-sufficiency by providing tools, resources and ways of evaluating material to allow clients to learn and enjoy the collections on an ongoing basis and with unmediated access if they choose that. Community groups such as U3A and the Adult Learning Association are working with libraries to enhance quality of life in the senior years. The State Library and public libraries are also aware of the importance of literacy, and provide both in-house and outreach services to develop adult literacy skills. The State Library's adult literacy services include collections resources, websites, adaptive technologies, training and grant funding. Some particularly positive examples highlight inter-generational learning as a way of fostering multiple benefits of lifelong learning, literacy development and community building. At the Wujal Wujal Indigenous Knowledge Centre[3] the Women's Justice Group (elders) runs a daily Homework Club for school children of the Bloomfield State School. The IKC makes available the venue, resources, stationery and tutorial assistance, and afternoon tea is provided when

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[2] http://edition.cnn.com/2004/TECH/06/07/health.computer.reut/ cited 14 June 2004

[3] Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) are based on the public library model, with options for enhancements in line with community knowledge needs.

students finish their tasks. The Homework Club has been highly successful both in terms of student participation levels and in improving the skills of all those involved.[4]

The crucial place of libraries as welcoming, accessible and community based organisations cannot be understated in any discussion about lifelong learning now and in the future.

State Library of Queensland policies and strategies

One of the key outcomes of the State Library of Queensland's *Future Directions* policy is lifelong learning. Policies and strategies aimed at addressing lifelong learning needs vary from services delivered directly to clients at the State Library locations, to support for public libraries in serving their communities, to the development of appropriate content available statewide.

The State Library is increasing access to a broad range of information sources and facilitating skill development in using new technologies, web-based services and other library resources, for people of all ages.

The State Library has funded, through its Innovations Grants (now the Library Strategic Development Grants) various lifelong learning projects such as the Logan City Libraries *Reading and Literacy for families (RALF)*. This project provided free adult education and literacy workshops targeted at parents and carers of children under five, based on the promotion of library services and practical sessions in assisting their children to access library resources.

Since 2002, the State Library of Queensland has provided free statewide access to online full-text databases – this allows Queenslanders, of any age or location to access quality information sources to support their learning needs.

In 2002-03 the State Library provided support for the establishment of the *Libraries for lifelong learning network* group and email list, comprising key representatives from the library, information and education sectors. The network facilitates the development of a cooperative environment where learners can access the widest choice of resources to support their information, leisure, cultural and social needs.

Through the *BHP Billiton skills.net roadshow Queensland*, online community training packages have been developed. The skills.net roadshow has delivered free Internet training to over 6,000 Queenslanders across 67 towns since 2001, and is planned to continue until 2005. Courses are targeted to a variety of age levels and interests – for example Seniors on the Net, Homework help, and Getting started on the Net. The courses offer people from throughout the State the opportunity to use the latest technology with the support of qualified trainers. Training courses are available through the State Library website, so the interest sparked in learning leads participants into new and different areas of interest.

The State Library programs for young people recognise that learning is lifelong and children are encouraged to see the value of libraries from an early age. School holiday programs such as the *Summer Reading Program*[5] developed by the State Library foster reading and learning, and can be delivered by public libraries, or accessed by parents at home, since being made available online in 2003. The *Summer Reading Program* is being developed as a national program from 2004.

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[4] Cooper, Debra *Beyond 4 walls: Adult literacy services in Queensland's public libraries.* 2004 Unpublished paper

[5] http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=10469 cited 14 June 2004

b) the ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of lifelong learning since 1997

The affect of technology on lifelong learning

Technological developments have had a significant impact on lifelong learning, as they have in all other aspects of life. As an enabler, providing broad access to information and new means of delivery, technology has become ubiquitous and fundamental. Technology has provided people with the ability to connect to each other in new ways, strengthening relationships and creating communities of interest that are not limited by geographic boundaries. Technology has provided people with lifelong opportunities as they acquire new skills to use it. Volunteers at the State Library are now working with equipment and software that they may not otherwise have had exposure to. Reference services provided using "chat" technology developed skills in the people at both ends of a reference enquiry.

"Digital divide"

Acknowledging all the developments in technology, there is still the need to provide equitable opportunities to access lifelong learning opportunities. The digital divide is still a reality however, and the need for reasonably priced telecommunications and information infrastructure remains a priority for many Australians.

There may be an expectation of access to technology which is not able to be met for regional and rural Queenslanders. For example, the *BHP Billiton skills.net roadshow* described above uses satellite technology which allows training to be provided anywhere with a reliable power supply. This gives remote communities the opportunity to use new technology, but their own regular access may be restricted due to a lack of similar technology locally.

Programs offered by the State Library enabled by technology

Through the Online Public Access in Libraries (OPAL) project which has received $5.7M in State Government funding since 1997-98, the State Library has provided for the statewide delivery of significant content (online databases, digitisation projects and online training programs has been made possible). This funding initially enabled the introduction of the Internet to over 150 Queensland library service points, and training for library staff to ensure there were skilled navigators in local communities. The State Library now offers a wide range of digitised collections and resources.

Picture Queensland

Linking to the National Library of Australia's *Picture Australia* project, *Picture Queensland* provides over 11,000 images online from the State Library photographic collections.

Connecting Queensland

Connecting Queensland, funded by OPAL, is an online community portal which allows community groups to create their own websites. Since its launch in mid-2003, over 85 community groups have developed their own websites, hosted by the State Library. Many of the groups taking up these opportunities may be attracting seniors, however their interest in this new technology is high. The Buderim Local History group now has its own website[6] which a member of the club is able to update and maintain. The Fort Lytton Historical Society[7] website author Jim Meehan felt *Connecting Queensland* enhanced lifelong learning, and went on to say

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[6] http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=2079 cited 16 June 2004
[7] http://www.connectqld.org.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=17331 cited 16 June 2004

I think it would be very appropriate (to mention their website in this submission) as I have just turned 75 I must be getting up with the oldies by now. I think it is a great idea for groups like ours who cannot afford a commercial site.

Music Queensland
80 music scores from pre-1930 have been digitised to provide broader access for the community through *Music Queensland*. This project also represents a collaboration between State and National Libraries, through the *Music Australia* project.

Pandora
Reflecting the importance of recording and preserving history in a digital age, the State Library has archived over 380 Queensland web sites through the National Library's *Pandora* project.

AskNow!
Technology has allowed new means of delivery of services. *AskNow!* is a collaboration between National and State Libraries in Australia to provide online interactive 24/7 reference service. This type of project is a model of organisations cooperating to deliver seamless service to people in meeting their information needs which should be fostered nationally, and resourcing support provided to such initiatives.

National statistical framework
When seeking support for the non-formal education taking place, it would be useful to have a national statistical framework for measuring the social impact of lifelong learning and the important role of institutions like libraries. Data is often limited to formal education and training sectors, which makes it difficult to depict quantitatively the real impact of libraries' work in supporting lifelong learning.

c) **the adequacy of any structural and policy changes at commonwealth and state level which have been made in response to these technological developments**

State Library of Queensland policy response
In delivering on its *Future Directions* policy, which was endorsed by the Queensland Cabinet in October 2001, the State Library is addressing the significant challenges generated by the information age. One particular achievement is the development of the Smart Library Network. The Smart Library Network is an integrated network of both physical and virtual community spaces creatively linking Queenslanders to information, knowledge and each other.

Traditionally libraries and library staff have focussed on the provision of information in print format. The Smart Library Network moves beyond the provision of print information to clients who walk through the library door. The Smart Library Network recognises the value of and impact of technology, collaboration and coordination in delivering community services. The success of programs delivered through the State Library directly affects the lifelong learning opportunities available to Queenslanders.

Legislative requirements
State and National Libraries have legislative requirements to preserve their cultural heritage, which means these institutions are developing collections of broad community interest, available for the long term support of lifelong learning outcomes. Some activities undertaken by individuals and community cultural groups support and

assist in the recording and preservation of cultural memory. These too are important examples of lifelong learning which have mutual benefits for the individual, the State Library and the broader community.

Equity of access

An important consideration for those offering lifelong learning and community education is how to recover costs of delivering such opportunities. Informal educational opportunities which may have attracted more participants when offered free of charge, might see a decline if charges were imposed to recover costs. Certain sectors of the community may be less likely to engage in lifelong learning offered with cost implications.

In an article entitled *Second level digital divide: Differences in people's online skills*, Eszter Hargittai, made the following pertinent observation:

> Policy decisions that aim to reduce inequalities in access to and use of information technologies must take into consideration the necessary investment in training and support as well. Like education in general, it is not enough to give people a book, we also have to teach them how to read in order to make it useful. Similarly, it is not enough to wire all communities and declare that everyone now has equal access to the Internet. People may have technical access, but they may still continue to lack effective access in that they may not know how to extract information for their needs from the Web. Although providing Internet access may help alleviate some problems of the digital divide, ...a second-level digital divide exists relative to specific abilities to effectively use the medium.[8]

Copyright

Review of copyright legislation needs to be seen as an ongoing responsibility to ensure that moral rights are recognised and protected, changes in the delivery of information are appropriately regulated, and as more information becomes available online it is able to be used appropriately.

Accessibility

In Queensland, the importance of accessibility has been recognised by the State Government by the adoption of Information Standards to be implemented across Government.

The Queensland Government Information Architecture (GIA) aims to promote the interoperability of communication and information systems and sharing of information resources across agencies. The GIA provides a guiding framework for IT policy development for Queensland Government agencies in the acquisition, development, management, support and use of information sets, information systems and technology infrastructure.[9]

Stakeholders in lifelong learning

Lifelong learning has implications for the maintenance of healthy, active, engaged communities, the benefits of which flow through to many areas of life. Given this, Government portfolios with interests in health and ageing become stakeholders in the work of libraries. As stakeholders they can collaborate on and support a whole range of activities to provide positive outcomes for people responding to technological developments.

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[8] http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue7_4/hargittai/ cited on 14 June 2004
[9] http://www.iie.qld.gov.au/site/informationstandards/current.asp cited on 16 June 2004

d) technological barriers to participation in lifelong learning and adult community education and ways and means by which these might be overcome

Barriers
Access to broadband, satellite technology, affordability of technology and connectivity issues are barriers for rural and regional Queenslanders in participating in lifelong learning. Local Councils providing free Internet access through their public libraries are faced with increasing costs, and are making choices about charging for access, or using money earmarked for other purposes to address this barrier.

Facilities such as videoconferencing are still relatively expensive, despite the benefits they offer in diminishing the effects of distance and isolation.

Access to retailers of equipment and help desk / servicing support options may be limited for people outside metropolitan areas, and the importance of technology means that lifelong learning could be adversely affected.

Currently anecdotal evidence suggests that people engaged in other roles in remote communities may be assisting their community with technological issues due to the lack of IT workers in regional areas. Access to the State Library training is providing people with skills and impetus to take up technology. One participant at the BHP Billiton skills.net Roadshow commented, "I now feel more confident to buy my own computer".

The limited availability of trainers in regional and rural areas is also a problem which could be resourced to improve lifelong learning and adult community education outcomes.

Solutions
Some barriers can be overcome. The State Library operates Business Research and Solutions Queensland (BR+SQ) which provides clients with access to commercial research services to meet business information needs. Similarly, Q.Comm Books is a commercial unit of the State Library which sources material in foreign languages for public library clients.

The Queensland Government is committed to maintaining the quality of public library collections and provides funding and other support through the State Library, to Local Government for this purpose.

The State Library is encouraging collaborative initiatives in publicly funded libraries throughout the State such as consortia purchasing, joint funding of training and other ideas which maximise the valuable role of libraries as a hub of lifelong learning in their communities.

e) the extent to which the training, professional development and role of adult educators has kept pace with or been influenced by technical and online developments since 1997;

Technology provides a useful vehicle to deliver the benefits of training to a greater audience. However, it is important that there be professional standards to ensure trainers have the necessary skills and competencies in a changing technological environment.

The State Library runs training courses every year to re-skill public librarians to assist them to meet their local communities' information needs. The success of this training is dependent on Local Governments recognising the value of training and releasing staff, or providing financial support to attend.

Generalisations about adult educators assist little. However, trainers who are technically competent with the equipment and tools they are using enhance any type of training. Even common technology such as powerpoint presentations and use of projectors and laptops can provide problems for some people delivering adult education and lifelong learning.

The considerable growth in the training sector creates issues for clients, who try to identify the legitimate and qualified trainers, when there is a plethora of online courses and qualifications available. Technical competency is an important aspect of making training viable and worthwhile to those being trained.

f) retraining strategies as an element in lifelong learning, especially for those living in rural and regional areas.

Retraining has become an important part of many careers and enhances lifelong learning, by encouraging people to embrace emerging technologies, stay competitive in the marketplace and keep people in touch with broader communities.

Through the delivery of the BHP Billiton skills.net roadshow, the State Library trainers report that women in regional Queensland often demonstrate lifelong learning skills through their role in running businesses, farms and families, while men may have not had as much exposure to retraining and skill enhancement.

The importance of retraining needs to be understood by decision makers in local communities to ensure the benefits of lifelong learning are developed and enhanced throughout Australia.

People develop skills to use and manage information that is provided in a variety of formats. Grandparents keeping in touch with their families, people unable to get work who are required to undertake training, workers looking for new ways to spend their valuable leisure time are all using skills learnt throughout the lifespan.

All of these client groups are welcomed and assisted by Queensland public libraries. Initiatives in retraining, and many other aspects of lifelong learning, particularly in rural and regional areas can be greatly enhanced by the involvement of libraries.