

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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**SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION REFERENCES
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE PROGRESS AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF LIFE-LONG
LEARNING**

SUBMISSION BY THE SPECIAL BROADCASTING SERVICE



SBS thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

BACKGROUND

SBS is established under the *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*. Its principal function, as set out in section 6 of the Act, the SBS Charter, is to provide multilingual and multicultural broadcasting services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.

In delivering on the Charter, section 6(2) requires SBS, among other things to:

- Increase awareness of the contribution of a diversity of cultures to the continuing development of Australian society
- Promote understanding and acceptance of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the Australian people
- Contribute to the retention and continuing development of language and other cultural skills
- As far as practicable, inform, educate and entertain Australians in their preferred languages

SBS' Charter requires it to reflect the changing nature of Australian society by presenting many points of view and using innovative forms of expression.

SBS delivers its services through radio and television and online. The main analogue television channel is also available on digital television widescreen, together with 2 digital-only multichannels, *The World News Channel* and *SBS Essential*. SBS' two radio networks are also available on digital television. The website www.sbs.com.au includes not only programming information but also video and audio streaming of news, information and programs, audience interaction and original creative content.

Part of the programming broadcast by SBS TV is generated by its commissioning arm, SBS Independent ("SBSi"). SBSi is responsible for commissioning a wide range of Australian drama and documentaries about multicultural Australia.

SBS AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

While the term 'life-long learning' has historically been understood to refer to the education and training sectors, the contemporary concept is broad and has many interpretations in the wider social and cultural community. The University of Western Sydney's School of Social Ecology and Lifelong Learning¹ provides the following definition:

Lifelong Learning refers to learning across the lifespan in terms of the personal, cultural, social and environmental contexts that relate to and impact on the nature of both education and learning.

Key research in the life-long learning field suggests it is characterised by three major elements:

- Education for a highly skilled work force
- Personal development for a rewarding life
- The creation of a strong and inclusive society

In fulfilling its Charter obligations, SBS contributes to life-long learning in a number of ways. SBS Television, Radio and Online services educate Australians about the culturally diverse nature of Australian society. As a whole, SBS programs and services provide an audio visual framework for appreciation of the complexities of the Australian population. This broad perspective of difference contributes to greater understanding among Australian citizens and helps maintain a vibrant, productive and socially cohesive democratic society.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS IN RELATION TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Comments provided are in relation to the progress and future direction of life-long learning, the lifelong learning needs of an ageing population, the way in which technological developments have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning and how these concepts relate to the activities of SBS.

The progress and future direction of life-long learning

While some SBS Television, Radio and Online services have specific educational objectives, SBS also contributes to the progress of life-long learning experiences of all Australians by creating an atmosphere of awareness that complements more formal educational structures.

SBS Television

SBS Television programming in more than 60 languages gives audiences the opportunity to enhance their appreciation of the changing nature of Australian society and provides a window to the rest of the world. It responds to the information needs of Australians and empowers them to increase their knowledge base across a range of engaging program streams.

News and Current Affairs programs keep Australians informed of world events and provide a national perspective on domestic political, economic and business events. SBS' current programs include:

- International news services *World News and World News Tonight*, which provide coverage of a breadth of issues and in-depth analysis of world events.
- The international current affairs program *Dateline*, which provides comprehensive reportage and analysis of major international news stories and events and their possible impact on Australia each week. The national current affairs program *Insight* concentrates on investigating political, economic, business and social matters of national interest.
- *WorldWatch* and the *World News Channel*, which provide international news bulletins, in language, for a wide range of language communities in Australia. The

WorldWatch schedule includes 21 different services in 17 languages from 18 countries. The *World News Channel*, SBS' digital service, repeats some bulletins from the *WorldWatch* schedule but also offers new, updated bulletins from several countries.

SBS documentaries and documentary series cover a broad range of subjects from current affairs and politics, science, history and archaeology, religion, race and culture through to food and health. Three examples broadcast in June 2004 were *D-Day the Shortest Day*, the three part *Dunkirk* series and the SBS Independent commissioned *Fahimeh's Story* which tells the story of an Iranian woman who migrated to Australia to change her life.

SBS Arts programs include documentaries on filmmakers, composers, conductors, photographers, architects, artists and actors.

SBS Indigenous programming, including *Living Black* and its predecessor *ICAM* canvasses Indigenous issues across a range of subject areas including news, sports, arts and culture.

SBS Digital Television

As described above, SBS currently provides two digital only television multichannels in addition to its existing analogue channel, which is also available in digital. SBS' two Radio networks are also broadcast on SBS digital television multichannels. SBS is currently experimenting with digital interactive services that will provide on-demand information to enhance SBS' news and current affairs programs.

Using multichannelling technology, SBS could potentially expand its digital television offerings far beyond what it is able to currently provide. To date, SBS has maintained its two digital only multichannels without dedicated funding to do so. With adequate funding made available, SBS has enormous capacity to provide a wide range of specialty programs tailored to respond to the unique needs of niche audiences.

The number of Australians who watch SBS has doubled over the last decade and continues to grow. New specialist channels will allow SBS to build on its natural strengths and provide rich new multicultural and multilingual content for all Australians.

SBS Radio

SBS Radio broadcasts education, entertainment and information services to Australian audiences in 68 different languages. These services make an essential contribution to the creation of a strong, inclusive society and have a direct impact on quality of life of the approximately 2.8 million Australians who speak a language other than English.

- SBS Radio broadcasts one-off information campaigns about essential government services. Information provided includes advice on electoral enrolment, changes to taxation requirements, water safety regulations and access to prescription drugs. This information helps enable NESB Australians to better participate in Australian democratic, social and economic life.
- In partnership with the Australia Day Council, SBS broadcasts information about the Australian of the Year Award and encourages nominations from overseas born Australians who excel in their chosen field.
- SBS Radio compiles information for Radio features to be used by its language broadcasters to provide learning opportunities for SBS audiences. In 2004, SBS

prepared a series of programs comparing international perspectives of the work of James Joyce. The series, broadcast in English and accompanied by non-English translations, was adopted by numerous SBS language programs.

- Education about cross cultural education and understanding is a pillar of SBS Radio programming. SBS broadcasters are encouraged to cover events and issues of importance to other cultural groups. It would not be unusual, for example, for the Somali program to produce a short piece in Amharic on the Vietnamese Tet Celebrations.
- While content is predominately Australian multicultural news and current affairs, SBS Radio programs are language rather than cultural or religion based. The Arabic program for example, includes news and features from Arabic speaking countries covering both Christian and Muslim perspectives.
- SBS Radio programs are a life-long learning resource for all Australians wanting to learn additional languages for business, travel or self improvement.

SBS Online

Since 1997, SBS has developed a range of online services that empower Australians to educate themselves. These services are referred to in greater detail below with reference to technological developments in life-long learning.

SBS Partnerships

Through ongoing relationships with Australia's cultural and educational institutions, SBS is a constant feature in learning experiences throughout the lives of many Australians:

- SBS regularly hosts school age and university work experiences students who learn about media production through placements in all parts of the organisation. SBS Radio broadcasters regularly work with school groups to impart a hands-on understanding of the world's diverse cultures.
- SBS' multilingual and multicultural radio and television programs are used by many educational institutions as reference materials for students studying languages other than English or learning about other cultures.
- SBS maintains close ties with some of Australia's leading cultural studies academics through work on major research projects. These relations provide SBS with a valuable academic perspective on its operations and help ensure academic teaching and research is grounded in relevant contemporary media practice.
- In recent collaborations with the Powerhouse Museum, the Australian Gallery and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, SBS Radio has harnessed its unique cultural and linguistic resources to help interpret overseas exhibitions for Australian audiences.

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

SBS, particularly SBS Radio, provides an essential life-long learning service to ageing members of Australia's migrant population.

As Australia's non English speaking migrants reach old age they can become less willing to access media services in English and tend to rely heavily on their first non English language for most communications. As described above, SBS Radio helps this group of Australians stay informed about national and international events and disseminates information about essential Government services to encourage active participation in Australian society.

By providing information and education services in all of the major languages spoken in Australia, SBS provides an essential lifeline to this section of the community.

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

SBS Online

Since 1997, SBS has introduced and rapidly expanded the content and services available through the range of web sub-sites housed at www.sbs.com.au. This expansion has enabled all Australians to enhance their life-long learning experiences by accessing permanent online information resources.

- GOLD! (www.sbs.com.au/gold), launched in 2001, was SBS New Media's first educational website developed in association with eight Victorian cultural organisations. The website is a large body of multimedia work with content drawn from various public institutions and produced in-house at SBS. The site celebrates the history of gold in Australia and the impact this had on developing Australia's multicultural heritage. The site is actively promoted to schools, teachers and parents.
- The youth focused multilingual *World Tales* website will provide interactive folk tales, myths and legends from around the world, brought to life in a contemporary context by Australian animators. Due to launch on 12 August 2004, the site will offer considerable supporting content including features on the animators, the cultural significance of the stories and storytellers, games and 100 text stories. An education component will provide resources and classrooms activities.
- SBS now provides 24 hour, on-demand audio access to SBS Radio programs in 68 different languages via the internet. While SBS Radio continues to broadcast on AM and FM frequencies to all capital cities SBS Radio Online makes these services accessible where ever there is an Internet connection.
- The SBS website provides a range of information to compliment SBS Television programs. *The World News*ⁱⁱ site for example, empowers users to explore international issues and increase their understanding of world events. The site includes transcripts of SBS Television programs that can be reviewed and analysed at length after the program has been broadcast. *The World Game*ⁱⁱⁱ site, Australia's most popular soccer portal, contains comprehensive online coverage of the game in Australia and internationally.
- *Easynews* is an internet English language learning tool. In consultation with the Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES), SBS Radio produces a weekly bulletin of news stories in three levels of English ability - Advanced, Intermediate and Elementary. News stories include grabs and features which are read in varying delivery styles. AMES develops teaching and language learning tasks for use by both teachers and students to accompany the bulletins. *Easynews* is used by students enrolled in AMES English classes around Australia.

Challenges to learning via the Internet

SBS research has identified a key challenge to life-long learning via the Internet. SBS' 2002 research Report into media and cultural trends in Australian society, *Living Diversity: Australia's Multicultural Future*^{iv}, confirmed anecdotal evidence that women from non-English speaking backgrounds are much more likely to be excluded from new media opportunities offered by Internet use. While the technology exists to potentially facilitate life-long learning via the Internet, cultural and economic barriers affect the ability of this group to take advantage of the opportunity.

CONCLUSION

As Australia's multicultural and multilingual public broadcaster, SBS makes a significant contribution to the life-long learning experiences of the Australian population. Almost 8 million Australians watch SBS at least once a week, SBS Radio has a potential audience of around 2.7 million Australians of non English speaking background and SBS websites continue to increase in popularity. With its range of services, SBS provides essential information and education opportunities to all Australians and increases awareness of the value of Australia's culturally diverse society. In fulfilling its Charter, SBS complements formal learning structures and promotes an inclusive and cohesive Australian society.

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ⁱ <http://www.uws.edu.au/about/acadorg/caess/ssell>

ⁱⁱ <http://www9.sbs.com.au/theworldnews/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://wwwiii.sbs.com.au/home/>

^{iv} http://sbs.com.au/media/2872SBS_Living_Diversity.pdf